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The Changing Roles of Women in Spain

as Depicted in the Novels of Carmen Martín Gaite

A Senior Honors Thesis

in the Department of Modern Languages—Spanish

Sweet Briar College

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Defended and Approved 08 April 2004

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The Changing Roles of Women in Spain as Depicted in the Novels of Carmen Martín Gaite

I. Introduction

During the twentieth century in Spain the roles women were expected to play in society changed drastically due to precipitous shifts in the political leadership of the nation. These shifts, accompanied by laws, either granted women full legal rights on a par with their male counterparts or totally restricted them, giving men absolute control over the women in their families. One author who lived through these changes herself and whose works center around female protagonists is Carmen Martín Gaite (1925-2000).

This study examines three of Carmen Martín Gaite's novels, each of which reflects a particular time period: one from the Franco era, *Entre visillos* (1958); one from the transitional period between the time of Franco and full-fledged democracy in Spain, *El cuarto de atrás* (1978); and one from the 1990s, *Nubosidad variable* (1992). In this study, I intend to show the following: the changes in Spanish society during distinct periods in history (the Franco regime from 1939 to 1975, the transition from dictatorship to democracy from 1975 to the 1990s, and the 1990s); an analysis of Martín Gaite's female protagonists in the chosen novels; and a comparision of the protagonists that reveals to what extent she used them to reflect the women of the particular period, the governing bodies in their society, and the manner in which women challenged or accepted their rights.

Carmen Martín Gaite is the focus for this work because she was an influential Spanish female writer who lived through the changes before, during, and after the Franco regime. She was born in Salamanca in 1925 as the younger of two daughters. Her father, who held progressive and feminist views, was a lawyer and her mother was a professor. Martín Gaite

notes her father's "'intimate conviction of women's superiority as human beings' and the speech he read at the Academy of Jurisprudence defending women's rights to economic independence" (qtd. in Davies 229). Thus, Martín Gaite was exposed to feminist views early on, and they certainly influenced her thinking.

Martín Gaite grew up in Salamanca and was about to begin secondary school when the Civil War broke out. Although her plans had been to study in Madrid, she remained with her family in Salamanca, described by Catherine Davies as "a profoundly conservative provincial city that was soon taken over by the Nationalists" (229). This proved to be a good decision because, although the city was bombed numerous times, Martín Gaite did not experience the violence suffered in the major cities of Madrid and Barcelona. Davies describes other events that the family experienced during the war:

> Some weeks after the outbreak of the war, Carmen's uncle, Joaquín Gaite, a friend of the great Salamanca philosopher Unamuno (and his only student of classical Greek), was executed for holding a Socialist Party membership card despite Unamuno's pleas for clemency. Carmen's father was safe because he belonged to no political party, but the family could not afford to be outspoken. These years were marred by fear and hunger. (229)

Martín Gaite finally attended secondary school at the Girls Institute of Salamanca, where all social classes were invited to attend. She went on to obtain the degree of *Filología Románica* from the *Universidad de Salamanca* in 1943. In 1948, she studied literature at the *Collège International de Cannes*. In 1953 she married Sánchez Ferlosio, a famous social realist writer,

but was separated from him in 1970 (Davies 230-231).[1] She had one child, Marta, in 1956 (she had another child that died at eight months). She was financially successful enough as a writer that she could focus solely on her writing, without the necessity of another job. She died suddenly and unexpectedly in 2000 ("El mundo").

Throughout her career she wrote non-fiction and fiction novels, short stories, poetry, and essays.[2] This accomplished author won numerous awards for her work.[3] She also wrote for several Spanish newspapers and journals such as: *Informaciones, Revista de Occidente, Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, El País, El Independiente,* and *ABC*. Her novel, *El cuarto de*

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[1] Martín Gaite separated from her husband before the end of the Franco regime, when it was still very difficult to do so. This aspect of her life may have affected her views on women's rights because she was not permitted a divorce under Franco's regime.

[2] These include *El balneario* (1955); *Entre visillos* (1958); *Las ataduras* (1960); *Ritmo lento* (1963); *El proceso de Macanaz: historia de un empapelamiento* (1970); *Ocho siglos de poesía gallega* (1972); *Usos amorosos del dieciocho de España* (1972); *La búsqueda de interlocutor y otras búsquedas* (1973); *Retahilas* (1974); *Macanaz, otro paciente de la Inquisición (1975); A rachas* (1976); *Fragmentos de interior* (1976); *El conde de Gualalhorce, su época y su labor* (1977); *Cuentos completos* (1978); *El cuarto de atrás* (1978); *El castillo de las tres murallas* (1981); *El cuento de nunca acabar* (1983); *El pastel del diablo* (1985); *Dos cuentos maravillosos* (1986); *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (1987); *Desde la ventana* (1987); *Caperuccita en Manhattan* (1990); *Nubosidad variable* (1992); *Agua pasada* (1993); *La reina de las nieves* (1994); *Cuentos completos y un monólogo* (1994); *Esperando el porvenir: Homenaje a Ignacio Aldecoa* (1994); *Lo raro es vivir* (1997); *Irse de casa* (1998); *La hermana pequeña* (1999); *Cuéntame* (1999); *Cartas de amor de la monja portuguesa Mariana Alcoforado* (2000); *Los parentescos* (2001); *Poemas* (2001); *Pido la palabra (2002);* and *Cuadernos de todo* (2002) ("El mundo").

[3] These include the *Premio Café Gijón* for *El balneario* in 1955, the *Premio Eugenio Nadal* for *Entre visillos* in 1995, the *Premio Extraordinario de Doctorado* in 1971, and the *Premio Nacional de Literatura* for *El cuarto de atrás* in 1978. She then won the *Premio Anagrama de Ensayo* for *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* ("El mundo") and became the first Spanish woman to be elected as an honorary fellow of the Modern Language Association in 1987 (Pérez, "Nubosidad" 301). She won the prestigious *Premio Príncipe de Asturias de Las Letras* in 1988 and the *Premio Nacional de Las Letras Españolas* in 1994.

atrás, was more studied than any other novel by a contemporary Spanish woman author from 1978-1988 (Pérez, "Nubosidad" 301).

Given her prominence among Spanish women writers, achievements, and life experience during the Civil War, the Franco era, and the post-Franco period, Carmen Martín Gaite and her female protagonists generate a worthwhile topic for study. Numerous writers wrote about the confinement of women to domestic activities, lack of education for young women, and other social pressures imposed upon the women of the Franco era; however, Martín Gaite stands out as an example of a woman who would understand the role of women before, during, and after Franco's regime due both to her prominence among other Spanish writers and to her role as a feminist critic. Janet Pérez states that Martín Gaite is the most significant of the postwar writers in Spain because she "became more experimental and more feminist, while the remainder of the group has evolved less ("Contemporary" 199). Phyllis Zatlin Boring expresses her view of Martín Gaite as a feminist writer: "there is no doubt that Martín Gaite is a feminist writer, fully conscious of women's restricted role in society and of the problems that role poses for the individual who wishes to develop herself fully as a person" (324-325).[4] Pérez further explains the author's preocupation with women's issues:

> ... acknowledging from her literary beginnings an obsessive concern for women's condition, women's inability to reconcile what they want from life with the lives they are living, and the frustrated feminine quest for a more acceptable identity that might result in being "apreciadas por los demás y por sí mismas," along with "el miedo a la libertad," logical for Spanish females under Franco, deprived of

[4] However, in spite of her apparently obvious feminism, Pérez notes that she has, "like many contemporary Spanish women writers, resisted classification as a feminist" ("Carmen" 169).

> autonomy, freedom, and viable options for an independent existence. Martín Gaite's oblique reference to gender constraints suffered by women under the reactionary regime proves unmistakable when read in the context of her work in its entirety ... it is clear that if a single dominant organizational principle forms the nucleus around which nearly every title revolves – a principle reducible to a single word – that word is "gender." ("Carmen" 169)

Although Martín Gaite writes about women and gender, she rarely discusses "specific feminist issues, like rape, male violence, child abuse and spousal abuse, abortion, lesbian themes and characters" (Pérez, "Carmen" 179). Instead, many times she has chosen to write about a young maturing woman who is "seeking to defend her independence, preserve her autonomy, and reject gender impositions" (Pérez "Carmen" 179). Often these women reject the normal feminine dress and behavior and enjoy writing, reading, or being alone more than cooking or cleaning. The fictional characters repeat these actions that are considered to be negative in terms of traditional "feminine" reading, such as the *novela rosa*[5], or romantic novel, and that are rejected by the traditional characters in the novel (Jaffe 214).[6] Martín Gaite identifies herself with these frequent protagonists in her work, calling them and herself *chicas raras* (Pérez, "Carmen" 179).[7]

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[5] More information about the *novela rosa* can be found in Martín Gaite's *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española.*

[6] Martín Gaite felt that literary models such as the *novela rosa* had an influence on women's behavior. The author applied this idea to the behavioral patterns of the practices of her non-traditional protagonists (Jaffe 214).

[7] The forthcoming book, The "Strange Girl" in Twentieth-Century Spanish Novels Written by Women by Dr. Ellen Mayock studies the idea of the *chica rara.*

As a non-traditional member of a patriarchal society, Martín Gaite never ceased to remember her fortune, "that she belonged to a privileged few, the fortunate child of affluent and enlightened parents," and used her upbringing in her first twenty-five years as a writer to bring attention to the social, cultural, and economic conditions that kept women from advancing, and, during her next twenty-five years, to go beyond the "confines of 'social literature' to emphasize more subjective and interpersonal factors (as opposed to earlier objective, collective, legal and socioeconomic obstacles) impeding women's self-realization and advancement" (Pérez, "Carmen" 180). In her novels, the plot is minimal because the actions of the protagonists (usually women) tend to be less important than the women's character. (Pérez,"Nubosidad" 302).[8]

Also significant to Martín Gaite's concepts of writing is the role of readers and the act of reading. She talks about the importance and difficulty of reading with an open mind in her essay, "The Virtues of Reading." She tends to include the literary experience of her characters in her novels, including the books her characters read and what they do with the knowledge that they obtain from them. In all of her works, Martín Gaite has tried to understand the female reader throughout history and incorporate these observations into her work.[9] This includes an

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[8] Martín Gaite's only male protagonist, David Fuente of *Ritmo lento* (1962), is a counterpart to the *chica rara*, and rejects patriarchal values. David has difficulty expressing his emotions, an aspect of the traditional "macho" gender type passed on to him by his father. Martín Gaite uses David to show that men are also negatively affected by gender roles (Pérez, "Carmen" 177).

[9] The difficulty of communication and the search for an interlocutor are recurring themes in her works. Martín Gaite's "La búsqueda de interlocutor," is an essay that discusses the reader's participation in the creation of meaning in her works and the author's dependence on the reader for the creative impulse to write (Garlinger 233).

examination of the books that were available for women, the type of behavior and characters that the books portrayed, and the political and social functions they served (Jaffe 141).

The concepts of a patriarchal society that espouse women's inferiority (seen through their enforced dependence on the males in their families, as well as the elements of silence, space, escape, and fantasy) are found in Martín Gaite's novel, *Entre visillos*. This novel was written at the peak of the Franco era in 1958, a time in which women's rights and status were diminished (Griffen 383). Pérez explains that the characters in this novel "repeatedly evoke the 'condición ventanera' of women, restricted to gazing outward from their domestic confinement upon life's passing" ("Carmen" 170). I will analyze how the female characters of this novel exemplify that condition.

We see an extreme change in terms of women's liberation in the 1978 novel, *El cuarto de atrás*. By this time, the Franco regime had ended due to his death in 1975 and many rights for women were reinstated through the Constitution of 1978. Here again, we will see how the female character of this novel exemplifies the condition of the women of the period. Even more change is found, however, regarding gender equality in the final novel to be studied, *Nubosidad variable* (1992). The female characters here also illustrate the condition of women in the 1990s. Thus, my thesis demonstrates a correlation between the evolution of the role of the woman in Spanish society and that of Martín Gaite's female characters in these three novels.

Martín Gaite herself is an expert in the social and literary history of Spain.[10] Joan Lipman Brown describes her as "an anthropologist to her own culture, a social critic who analyzes Spanish society" (qtd. in Pérez, "Carmen" 169). Because the events and social climate

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[10] Catherine Jaffe notes that "Carmen Martín Gaite's engagement with history influenced her understanding of the literary models held up to women from the eighteenth century to the post-Spanish Civil War period she knew from her own experiences" (215).

of the time in which Carmen Martín Gaite lived were major influences on her writing, it is necessary to understand the society in which she wrote.

II. Historical Background

Historical Background to *Entre visillos*

Although Spanish society enjoyed a degree of liberalism during the short-lived Republic (1931-1939), Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) was characterized by its conservative constraints. The restrictions and censorship particularly affected women. Franco's dictatorship officially began with the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939. But it was in 1936 that the other generals who were against the Republican government of the New State (which was not yet built) put him in control of Spain as *Generalísimo*, and *Caudillo*, for an indefinite amount of time. Their objectives included winning the Civil War and imposing a "New Order" that would change both public and private life in Spain (Ramos Gascón 17). Once they had won the war, Franco took control as the Head of the State (Hooper 23).

Franco managed to remain in control of Spain until his death in 1975, a period of almost forty years. His reign was comparable to those of such infamous dictators as Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini (Ramos Gascón 17), as the estimated number of deaths for political reasons during the first ten years of his rule numbered between one and two million (Pérez "Contemporary" 90). Although only half of the Spanish population had supported his Nationalist side in the Civil War, by 1939 most of the other half also passively accepted his control due to their situation after the war (Payne 231). After a severely violent war that included torture (mutilation, rape, dismemberment, castration, decapitation, etc.), execution, bombing, massacre, and imprisonment by the military and the Civil Guard, the population suffered from hunger, weakness and general crisis after the end of the war (Ranzato 103).

Franco's support consisted of several groups on the National or Franco side that covered a wide and diverse background: Spain's fascist party, the Falange, as well as officers of the army, the Catholic Church, the tradionalists, and the monarchists (Ross 82). Others that supported Franco's forces were landowners, especially from central and southern Spain, the bourgeois members of society in areas such as finance and industry, and certain members of the middle class such as farmers (Ramos Gascón 18). Three years later in 1939, these groups were on the winning side of the Spanish Civil War that cost half a million people their lives. Under Franco, these would be the groups that controlled Spain until his death (Hooper 22). No opposition parties were allowed.

Finally, with complete power, Franco created a government with laws and a parliament (*Cortes*) into which he incorporated his philosophy of traditionalism and autocracy, as well as the fascist elements that he borrowed from other European countries (Maxwell 5). The new regime was very centralized (Payne 231). From fascist politics he learned to emphasize national economic independence and agricultural growth rather than industrial development. The goal was self-sufficiency (Ross 98). There were, however, several distinguishable and significant characteristics of the "New State" that were uniquely Franco's:

- The New State had no Constitution. Instead there was a series of regulations called the "Fundamental Laws."
- Without a set constitution, the "New State" could be changed according to the needs of the time and at the discretion of Franco.
- There were no political parties.

- There was an extreme concentration of personal power. Franco had supreme control as the Head of State, Government Premiere, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and the Leader of the Movement.
- Franco had legislative power. Once the *Cortes* was formed, he still had the supreme authority to dictate general laws (Ramos Gascón 23).
- While there were no political parties, those factions that had been on Franco's side (the military, the Falange, the Church, the monarchists, the Traditionalists, and the civil service) were grouped into "clans," ideological groups and lobbiers that had no legal status but were responsible for public administration (Ross 100).

As previously mentioned, one of the goals of Franco's regime was for Spain to be economically independent. This was a difficult goal in the 1940s, a time known to Spaniards as "the years of hunger."

The Civil War caused a major economic depression. During the 1940s, Franco's regime went to great lengths to keep the outside world from learning of the famine Spain was suffering (Hamilton 215). The death rate in 1941 was estimated to be double what it had been before the Civil War (Hamilton 196). Food rationing and energy conservation became a way of life.

Coinciding with the poor Spanish economy of the 1940s were several changes in Franco's government. [11] On July 17, 1942, Franco announced his first plans to reinstitute the *Cortes* with his "Creation of Parliament Act." This new single chamber Parliament shared few

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[11] To give an idea of the gravity of the slump in Spain's economy, during the entire 1940s, the per capita income was never able to reach that of 1935 (Ramos Gascón 45). According to the Secretary of the National Economic Council, an official body of the Franco regime, "in 1940, unadjusted Spanish income had fallen to that of 1914, but given the growth in population, per capita income actually dropped to nineteenth-century figures; in other words, the Civil War had caused an unprecedented economic slump" (Ramos Gascón 45).

principles with the previous body on which it had been based (Ross 99). Franco appointed the new members, and the *Cortes* opened on March 17, 1943 (Payne 324).

On July 17, 1945, Franco announced his charter, *Fuero de los Españoles*. A major point of this charter was his abandonment of the term "totalitarian" and the introduction of the expression "organic democracy." This was Franco's attempt to make his government appear democratic, while remaining anything but democratic. "Organic democracy" was based on the idea that it was in an individual's best interest to be represented through established societal bodies, not political parties. These groups included government-controlled trade unions, the Church, the family (with a patriarchal hierarchy), and professional associations. Contrary to most concepts of democracy, this charter gave way to censorship, denial of rights such as a ban on political parties and freedom of speech, as well as discrimination against former Republican supporters (the opposing side during the Civil War) (Ross 99).

Franco's regime was known for its intense censorship and military control. Censorship operated both at a political level and in defense of Catholic morality, firmly excluding any suggestion of eroticism (Carr 119). Franco forced censorship on many areas of private and public life. From 1938, when the *Ley de la Prensa* was passed, until 1966, the Franco government could legally censor all forms of media and literary expression during a state of siege (Herzberger, "Literacy" 185). Since Spain was officially declared to be in a state of siege for these twenty-eight years, the Franco regime could repress and censor all materials during this time (Herzberger, "Literacy" 185). [12]

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[12] In terms of security and military force, the size of the army grew after the Civil War. The expansion of the army in Franco's political system is a reflection of the instability of his dictatorship (Hooper 80).

Franco was suspicious of intellectual areas like books and culture, and others, especially those who had been on the side of the Republic against the Nationalists in the Civil War. Franco had many of these people exiled or even killed. Those who remained in Spain faced great repression (Carr 46). Hundreds of Spanish and foreign authors were prohibited from being published in Spain (Herzberger, "Literary" 185). Works that were censored include some by the Generation of 1898 and the Generation of 1927 writers (Pérez, "Contemporary" 91). During the time of censorship, much of the literature that circulated was promoted by the State and was "intended to affirm the morally and historically correct role of the Regime and its suppositions of governance" (Herzberger, "Social" 158). One of the first strategies for gaining control of all writing was to reestablish the journal, *Bibliografía General Española e Hispanoamericana.* The first issue of the journal in 1941 under the Franco regime (following a five-year hiatus due to the war), reminded the people of the urgency of promoting culture and changing the publishing industry. Their support for the Franco regime can be seen in their plea, "*Bibliografía*...repite emocionante en su primer número, que aparece al cumplirse el Segundo aniversario de la Victoria, el hombre del Caudillo; ¡Franco! ¡Franco! ¡Franco! ¡Viva España! ¡Arriba España!" (Herzberger, "Social" 158). Another popular form of narrative of the State during this period were biographies which "promoted the ideological exigencies of fascism and aristocracy" (Herzberger, "Social" 159).

As a supporter of Catholicism, Franco did not outlaw other religions, but he did forbid the public expression of them. Christianity, namely Catholicism, constituted a large part of Spain's national identity (Carr 107). The Church was also involved in censorship, especially concerning sexual matters. Censorship took on a Puritan zeal in those areas during Franco's rule. For example, sex was thought of as basically taboo; it existed only for procreation between

husband and wife, even though prostitution was legal. It was not difficult for Franco and the Church to maintain these moral standards because the society after the Civil War was still very traditional in terms of sexuality and women's rights (Hooper 187-188).

By 1950, Franco's Spain was still suffering great economic losses.[13] It was not until 1951 that the national income climbed back to the levels obtained before the Civil War (Carr 52). The 1950s then saw some economic growth in Spain. In 1957, the government introduced innovations into the economic policy to achieve rapid industrial growth.[14] The Stabilization Plan was created on July 21, 1959 in order to tackle inflation.[15] This plan achieved what it set out to do, but at the cost of other aspects of Spanish life. There was a large amount of migration from the country to the cities due to the decline in agriculture and the increase in the number of city jobs.[16]

Economic prosperity continued through the 1960s. The last twenty-five years of the Franco regime (1950-1975) created the period of the greatest economic growth in Spanish

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[13] Although a United Nations-sponsored trade boycott (as punishment for having been taken over by a right-wing dictator) was lifted in 1950, the agricultural output fell even lower than at the end of the Civil War (Hooper 24). The status of agricultural output is important to note as fifty per cent of the active population of Spain was engaged in agriculture in 1950 (Maxwell 6).

[14] The Office of Economic Coordination and Planning was set up to plan national economic policy; it eventually culminated with the First Development Plan of 1964 (Carr 53).

[15] The plan was a series of measures taken to liberalize international trade and drastically change legislation governing foreign investment in Spain (Ramos Gascón 52). Spain opened up for foreign investment, restrictions on imports were lifted and incentives were given for exports (Ross 111). Investment poured into the country as the Plan encouraged tourism (Carr 58).

[16] A problem for the Franco regime was that as tourism and emigration flourished, Spaniards began to realize that their country's government was not ideal in any way, but that instead their standard of living and personal freedom were much lower than in other Western European countries (Ross 112).

history.[17] The wealth that Spain enjoyed at this time led to a better standard of living.[18] However, Spain's political evolution lagged behind its economic evolution. In fact, its membership in the European Economic Community was rejected in 1962 because it was not a democracy (Ross 113).

The impact of social and economic changes on behavioral patterns was significant. Spain adapted to the norms of Western consumer society rapidly. Soon there was chronic traffic, congestion, pollution, and housing shortages. The latter was aggravated by the millions of Spaniards that left the countryside for the cities in the 1950s and 1960s. Some social changes led to the necessity of welfare and increased social services (Hooper 91).

There were positive consequences as well. Internal migration facilitated the growth of the middle class in the cities as there were more jobs for them there. Rising living standards created the demand for a better education, which in turn led to the accessibility of education and the expansion of social security. All of these changes, however, beneficial or not, made Spain vulnerable to Europe's economic recessions and booms, which would later have a large impact on the country (Maxwell 8).

The world economic crisis began in 1973 with the rise of oil prices affecting many Western European countries especially through high unemployment rates, energy shortages, and

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[17] From 1961 to 1973, the economy grew seven per cent per year and the income level per person quadrupled. The per capita income grew about nine per cent annually from 1959 to 1964: between 1960 and 1975 it tripled (Maxwell 6). By the early 1960s, Spain was no longer considered a developing nation by the standards of the United Nations and was the world's ninth industrial power. Their wages and salaries rose to sixty-three per cent of the net national income by 1975 (Maxwell 8). Although this was a period of development for the rest of the world as well, Spain's rate of growth was greater than that of all Western European countries (Payne 463).

[18] This meant that more people had better diets, and electrical amenities like televisions, telephones, refrigerators, cars, and washing machines (Payne 485).

high costs of manufactured goods. This crisis also reached Spain.[19] In fact, Spain felt the world's crisis more intensely than any other Western European country. The beginning of this crisis coincided with the end of the Franco regime (Ramos Gascón 59). When Franco died in 1975, the country was again in a position for needed political and economic reform.[20]

Spain was a much different country than it was prior to Franco's economic reform. It went from a rural to an urban society and from an agricultural to an industrial economy.[21] The social changes that economic growth and crisis brought about were an important part of the development after Franco's death.[22] The new middle class facilitated the transition from dictatorship to democracy. This was true in part because as the middle class moved from the rural country areas to the inner cities, their political views changed. Many middle class members lost their conservative ideas as they relocated (Hooper 33).

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[19] Spain's newfound oil dependency made them vulnerable to the crisis. By 1973, oil accounted for 66.9 per cent of all sources of energy, whereas in 1960 the figure was only 28.8 per cent. The cost of oil imports grew from 1,097 million dollars in 1973 to 3,570 million dollars in 1974. The average economic growth of Spain fell from 6.5 per cent in 1965 to 1.5 in 1974 (Ramos Gascón 59).

[20] Kenneth Maxwell notes that in a study of the economy of Spain the Gross Domestic Product went from 6.7 per cent to 2.2 per cent, the unemployment rate from 2.7 per cent to 5.3 per cent, and the inflation rate from 6.7 per cent to 18.3 per cent between the periods of 1968 to 1973 and 1974 to 1979 (47).

[21] For example, in comparison to the 50% of the Spanish population that was engaged in agriculture in 1950, only 29% continued this tradition by 1970 (Maxwell 6). Although the changes appeared to improve the economy, the reality was that it meant that Spaniards had to work especially hard to compete with the rest of Europe.

[22] The new generation of business executives and an urban rather than rural middle class meant that cities were becoming overcrowded and the wealth of the country unevenly distributed (Payne 491).

By the 1970s, Spanish society was more modernized, consumer-oriented, moderate, and capitalistic, with a growing middle class (Maxwell 14). But some of the greatest changes that the decade saw dealt with women's issues. The sexual standards changed drastically due to the shift in the political leadership after Franco's death. Long before Franco's regime, Spain historically had connections to Islam and Catholicism, both of which held women at a lower level than men. Also, the division of women in the categories of whore or mother and the elevation of male attributes are rooted in the Castilian language and the Catholic Church. These, among other social and moral values, were sustained and encouraged under Franco's dictatorship (Hooper 193).

Before Franco's regime, the Civil War increased women's participation in public life. Although it was mainly by necessity, women became involved in political and military organizations in the factories and on the front lines in battle. They became involved in support work that had been previously done by men, in the hospitals and providing supplies. However, this involvement ended in 1939 when Franco came into power (Carr 85).

The women's movement was stifled for several reasons. Not only did the urgent postwar needs overshadow women's rights, but Franco and Spanish tradition stood in the way of advances for many years. Discriminatory practices were so deeply ingrained in Spanish tradition and had been practiced for so long that many women had internalized the views themselves (Vollendorf 315). The Fascist government reversed the advances in women's rights gained by the Second Republic and instituted policies that obstructed change in women's situation for the next several decades. Before the Facist government took action, women had started to acquire economic independence, as well as the ability to work outside the home. For example, in 1938 the Nationalists revoked a Republican divorce law passed in 1932 (Hooper 197). Women

suffered setbacks during Franco's reign in all areas in which they had begun to advance, especially in their involvement in public life (politics, industry, culture, art and literature) and their personal rights (in the home, in the workplace, and in financial matters).

Franco's politics and values, as well as the poor economy, retarded the women's movement, which in turn greatly affected women's writing and their audiences. There was a lack of interest in a woman's voice and the belief that women writers were not as professional as male writers (Vollendorf 280).

The attitudes and historical patriarchal norms that Franco supported defined a woman as a possession rather than as an individual with equal rights. Government regulations curbed economic independence for women, determined the conditions under which women could work outside the home, and offered incentives and rewards to encourage them to marry, have a large family, and stay at home. The woman's place was the home and her work was "fit for her sex" (Ramos Gascón 184). The 1938 *Fuero de Trabajo* restricted women's work: this law prohibited night work by women, regulated home industry, and prohibited married women from working in a workshop or factory. A married woman's right to work for money was withdrawn completely in 1942. It was restored in 1961, but only with the husband's permission (Brooksbank Jones 76). Franco's *Fuero de los Españoles* (1945) offered payments to large families – given to the father, not the mother – to stimulate growth after the large drop in population due to the Civil War (Brooksbank Jones 75). The woman was only important as a wife and mother; therefore, her greatest goal was to find a husband, and then as a married woman, she was to wait on the husband and give him children (Ferrán 98).

The Franco regime exalted the hierarchal family, giving complete control and authority to the husband, meaning that the wife must defer to him in all matters. Article 57 of the Spanish

Civil Code stated, "the husband must protect his wife and she must obey her husband" (Hooper 196). Civil law treated women as minors who never achieved equal citizen status and were instead passed from their father to a husband once they were married. They were not permitted to have their own bank accounts. They were only allowed to obtain passports with the approval of their husbands (Vollendorf 312). All of these limitations were due to the *permiso marital.*

There are many examples of *permiso* marital. A woman could not do any activity outside of the home without her husband's permission; however, the husband did not need the wife's permission for anything. The husband did not need the wife's permission before selling, lending or mortgaging the property that he had brought into the marriage; however, she required his permission to do so with property she had brought into the marriage. She had no control over what they acquired together. The husband had paternal authority over the children: the wife did not have control. Battered wives could not legally leave their homes without committing desertion (Hooper 196). The criteria for adultery were different for men and women. Adultery was always illegal and punishable by a prison sentence for the woman. For men it was only illegal if the husband was living with a mistress, the adultery was public, or he committed the adultery in the family home. A man could legally kill his wife or daughter (until 1958) if he caught her in the act of adultery, while the maximum crime for men was exile (Brooksbank Jones 76). Also, there was no law to ban brothels until 1956. Even then, it was not effectively implemented (Hooper 193).

Divorce was also outlawed (1938). Only annulment or legal separation was permitted. Both were difficult to obtain though, because they were very expensive. They required that the wife or husband accept guilt for the separation, which meant that they also forfeited custody of their children and the right to alimony (Hooper 198).

Moral values were extremely important due to their association with honor, a lingering medieval concept. Honor could easily be lost both by one's own actions and those of others, particularly one's relatives (Hooper 192). The Spanish legal system contained legislation that emphasized the importance of the honor code. For example, it gave a less severe punishment to an unmarried woman who aborted or killed her newborn child in order to "hide her dishonor." However, birth control was outlawed within a few months of the end of the Civil War and was therefore not available, giving few options to women who wanted to maintain their "honor" in the case of out-of-wedlock pregnancy (Vollendorf 312).

Franco's regime aimed to teach women that independence was not their ultimate aspiration. Instead, marriage should be their ultimate goal. It tried to teach women that the way to attract the ideal husband was through religious practice and sexual purity. This was enforced in their mandatory *Sección Femenina*. This restriction can even be seen in the dress of the times. Important articles of dress were restrictive girdles and tightly pinned hair (a sign of purity). This is another example of how women of this period were objects in a patriarchal society. Their life choices concerning sexuality, dress, and other decisions were made for them by their male counterparts (Vollendorf 313).

With the moral and honor code, the importance of sexual purity, and the control of women by men, women had few paths to choose. They were narrowed down to two choices: domestic (housewife) or religious (nun). Both of these choices ensured that the woman would be protected for the rest of her life. Also, both professions entailed sacrifice and renunciation, the most admired of virtues for women. Women were expected to model their lives after respected ideals, such as the Virgin Mary, Isabel la Católica and Santa Teresa. The *Sección Femenina* of the Falange, created in 1934, helped to prepare young women for their place in the Spanish

society with these morals in mind (Vollendorf 313). Membership was compulsory: by the end of the Civil War, 580,000 women were members (Davies 108).

Pilar Primo de Riviera ran the *Sección Femenina,* which held mandatory social service with classes in cooking, nutrition, childcare, and other domestic areas. They taught the young women how to be uncomplaining wives. They learned to be pleasant at all times, supportive by all means, and self-sacrificing for their husbands, with a spotless home and happy family (Vollendorf 314). The *Sección Femenina* was a strong force for women during the Franco period. It projected the ideal women of the community. Ferrán describes the *Sección Feminina* well when she quotes Pilar Primo de Rivera as saying, "Las mujeres nunca descubren nada: les falta desde luego el talento creador, reservado por Dios para inteligencias varoniles; nosotros no podemos hacer nada más que interpretar mayor o peor lo que los hombres han hecho" (102). While the short-term goals of the *Sección Femenina* were the positive reinforcement of feminine values like submissiveness and purity, their long-term effects were more serious, negating any ideas of self-assertion (Vollendorf 314).

The Fascist party proudly affirmed that Spain was different from other European countries and that the family and women were examples of the nation's high values. The regime took advantage of the media's growing technology. Using radio, and later television, they made the feminine ideal a part of the culture. Images of the socially acceptable "good woman" became everyday and normal. The only types of publications seen as appropriate for women, the romantic novel and certain magazines, had the same normative effect on society (Carr 127-130).

These restrictions on women's freedom can be referred to as the *encierro* (*enclosure*). Both before and after Franco's death, the *encierro* is of great importance to Martín Gaite's writing. Pérez describes the *encierro* in the following way:

> ...the restriction of women to domestic space, the systematic discouragement of female higher education and the legal barriers raised to women's access to the workplace and public arena, the prescriptive, limited readings imposed upon girls, their vigilant guardianship by parents and parental surrogates, and the single-minded preparation of females for marriage and motherhood, while prescribing their compliance with the 'double standard' and 'being owned.' (170)[23]

Historical Background to *El cuarto de atrás*

Sweeping changes were made in Spain after Franco's death in 1975, not only concerning the areas of the *encierro*, but also to meet the other needs of people in political, social, and economic areas. The new Constitution of 1978 eradicated censorship, guaranteed new rights, and gave women an opportunity to be educated and to enter the workplace. It also meant a new role for women writers because many more women were being published and the censorship that had constricted them was eradicated. As the role of women in society changed, so did female characters in works of female authors.

Nevertheless, the transition from a dictatorship to democracy was not simple. There was an extreme sense of anxiety among the Spanish citizens about what would happen to their country after Franco's death. Although by that time most did not agree with the decisions and politics of Franco, he had been in control for thirty-six years, making all of the important decisions (Ross 123). While Spaniards were anxious about political change, they wanted modernization and Europeanization. They wanted a more representative government that could

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[23] Martín Gaite wrote several stories in addition to *Entre visillos* that demonstrate the lack of non-matrimonial options for women due to their lack of education and their inability to advance or become independent. Some of these works are, "La oficina" (1954), "Los informes" (1954), "La conciencia tranquila" (1956), "La tata" (1957), and "Un alto en el camino" (1958).

fulfill their needs and answer their demands better than Franco had done. Democratization in Spain took place by consensus driven by those who had been secretly anti-Franco during his dictatorship.

There were some, however, who objected to the change in government. The army, one of the major powers at that time due to their involvement in Franco's government, knew that much would need to change in Spain for it to become a democracy. It knew that as a repressive institution, it could only lose power in a democracy. For this reason, throughout the transition to democracy, the threat of military intervention was real. One important institution in Franco's era, the Church, however, moved away from the idea of a dictatorship and embraced democracy. Those who wanted to return to the past regime had little influence by the 1980s (Maxwell 28).

The new head of the government was King Juan Carlos. He appointed Adolfo Suárez to be the Head of State in 1976. Hooper explains that in his new position, Suárez was a leader in the return to democracy:

> By November, three months after the swearing in of his government, he had laid before the *Cortes* a political reform bill which would introduce universal suffrage and a two-chamber parliament, consisting of a lower house, or Congress, and an upper house to be called Senate. (40)

His bill won with a vote of 425 to fifty-nine (Hooper 40). He also legalized trade unions and political parties (Hooper 41). After the legalization of political parties, Suárez joined the largest party, the Centre Democratic Union (Ross 126). The 1978 Spanish Constitution established a parliamentary monarchy, stated that there would be no official religion, ordered the armed forces to have a more limited role, eliminated the death penalty, and the set the voting age at eighteen. Divorce and abortion, however, remained illegal (Hooper 43).

The Socialists won the majority in Congress in the 1982 elections, and Felipe González became the Prime Minister (he remained in office until 1996) (Davies 183). The Socialist party was strong but moderate (Maxwell 28). It aimed to improve and expand Spain's infrastructure, especially the roads; reform education; reform cultural affairs and social policy; and finish what Franco had left undone (such as the reform of the military,[24] international affairs, and the economy) (Maxwell 28).[25] Spain's transition process became an invaluable example of a peaceful and successful transition from a dictatorship to a democracy. Spain transformed itself from a highly centralized to a highly decentralized system of government (Ramos Gascón 64-65). Effective democratic leadership emerged from an increasingly competitive representative political system (Ramos Gascón 74-76). With modernization, Spain also saw the secularization of the Church and politics (Carr 100).

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[24] The reform of the military, which was one of the main of focus, had three major objectives: to make Spain's defense more like the rest of Western Europe's, to professionalize the armed forces, and to make Spain more independent of foreign arms supplies by encouraging domestic suppliers. With these goals they did a lot to bring the army under tighter control so that change could be effected without its intervention (Maxwell 30).

[25] Under the Socialists, Spanish democracy was solidly fused, the relationship with the United States was made more equitable, Spain joined the European Community, and major economic reforms were implemented (Ross 143). But even during periods of rapid growth, the Spanish economy had remained heavily protected by high tariffs and insulated from competitive forces. As democratization began, the structural problems in the Spanish economy became apparent: an entrepreneurial class not accustomed to competition, a highly inefficient state structure, and the production of excessive goods in areas with limited domestic or international demand (Maxwell 43). Some of the important political, economic, and social contracts during this transitional time were: the Moncloa Pacts (1977), the Inter-Confederation Framework Agreement (1980), the National Employment Agreements (1981), and the Social and Economic Agreement (1984) (Maxwell 44). In 1986, Spain joined the European Economic Community (Ramos Gascón 83). With these achievements Spain moved dramatically to assert a new role in Europe and on the world stage. Their convergence with the Western European consumer society was rapid.

In addition to Spain's advancements in politics, its economic and social welfare also approached the standard of living of most developed countries of Western Europe. In 1980, it was the eleventh leading industrial nation in the world (Maxwell 6). Its average disposable income was higher than any other Western European country. An important part of the economy flourished by 1978: the total number of tourists in Spain reached forty million (more than Spain's population that year of thirty-seven million) (Maxwell 8).[26]

The birthrate in Spain dropped faster than in any other country in Western Europe due to the choices that were finally offered to women, including the availability and legality of contraception and women's ability to work out of the home and have careers (Hooper 103). Great progress was made in improving educational opportunities, social conditions, and the status of women and minorities. For example, the number of children at school doubled from four million in 1966 to eight million in 1977, with an equal number of boys and girls. The number of female university students also rose from 22,000 in 1960 to 261,000 in 1977 (Davies 176).

Another benefit of the end of the Franco era and the move to democratization was the change in the media and the press. The contact with the rest of the world was difficult after the decades of enforced cultural isolation of the regime (Carr 127). Finally, the presses were more modernized and the magazine industry flourished. Censorship was only a fraction of what it was under Franco. The changes in the media also had an effect on social conditions. Television and magazines proposed sexual as well as political liberation. Sex was no longer taboo, causing drastic changes in what was seen in newspapers, magazines, novels and art (Carr 132). The daily

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[26] Spain then began to deal with (and is still faced with) some common problems of developed countries such as health care, good schooling, social services, and low-cost housing. It also faced air pollution problems due to increased technology and industrialization. And, although its crime rate was lower than in the rest of Europe, crime was becoming more apparent, especially crimes involving drugs (Hooper 117).

newspaper, *El País*, gave a new energy to the press and continues to be a popular source of news today (Carr 132).

Women's issues were addressed as well. Shortly before Franco's death in 1975, Spain abolished the *permiso marital.* The new Constitution of 1978 provided several beneficial changes for women: it prohibited discrimination based on sex; the laws against adultery were revoked; and contraception was legalized (Vollendorf 6). The changes that benefited women continued into the 1980s. In 1981, the articles in the Spanish Civil Code that had put women at such a disadvantage with regards to their children and family finance matters were replaced (Hooper 197). In 1981, the socialist *Partido Feminista* became legal. In 1982, divorce laws were liberalized. In 1983, the Spanish Civil Code declared that the wife and husband were to share *patria potestad*, meaning that they could both decide on matters that affect the whole family (Ramos Gascón 188). Women's organizations have grown since the new Constitution. Three organizations that have played great roles in publicizing discussion on women's issues were formed: the *Seminario de Estudios de la Mujer* (Madrid, 1980), the *Instituto de la Mujer* (Madrid 1983) and the *Institut Catalá de la Dona* (Barcelona, 1989) (Vollendorf 6).

The increase in women's involvement in women's issues coincided with the increase in the number of women involved in literature. The lifting of censorship was essential to this body of literature (as well as to all literature in Spain). Because of the harsh restrictions on literary expression during Franco's regime, post-Franco readers and critics anticipated a burst of creativity and originality in all forms of literature and art. According to Hertzberger, the "strict censorship in postwar Spain disrupted the normal development of the literary arts from one generation to another and conditioned the reading and viewing public as well" (186). Everyone expected to see a great wave of expression that had been silenced for so many years. Many

believed that the freedom of the press and of the arts would transform modern Spanish literature into a period of experimentation and change (Herzberger, "Literary" 185).

To some extent this happened with the appearance of novels and plays that had been censored and the formation of new publishing companies and literary magazines; however, the literary boom that was expected did not occur. This was due in part to the long term effects of censorship. For example, in 1979, forty-two per cent of Spaniards could not name a Spanish author and fifty-nine per cent did not buy even one book per year (Herzberger, "Literary" 186). What was achieved in the post-Franco literature were the appearance of more female authors and a new "brand of literature whose nature, to a large degree, is being determined by the newly-found freedoms and interests of the Spanish public" (Herzberger, "Literary" 185). Some female authors that wrote during this time were Ana María Matute, Concha Alós, Esther Tusquets, Rosa Montero, Dolores Medio, Elena Quiroga, María Aurélia Capmany, Lidia Falcón, Ana María Moix, Marina Mayoral, and Carmen Martín Gaite.

All of the feminist activity in the post-Franco period allowed for the emergence of a feminist journal that was important for the future victories of women writers: *Vindicación feminista* appeared in 1976. Lidia Falcón published this monthly journal until 1979. She was a major activist in Spanish feminism and also the founder of Spain's first *Partido Feminista* (1979) (Pérez, "Contemporary" 155). The journal created a center for women with the objective of unifying the feminist sector (Vollendorf 319). The journal carried articles on social, legal, and political issues. It corrected the errors of pro-Franco histories and widened the readers' awareness by including international news or articles on specific countries, which usually provided some information about women. It devoted most of its space, however, to subjects of national interest (Vollendorf 322).

Historical Background to *Nubosidad variable*

Spain continued its growth (political, economic, social, and cultural) after Franco's death through the1970s, into the 1980's, and then into the1990's and the twenty-first century. In terms of social growth, education improved and the illiteracy level went down. From 1982 to 1992 the illiteracy rate for women declined by a third to reach seven per cent (which was still slightly higher than men's illiteracy level) (Brooksbank Jones 69).

Concerning work and occupation, the number of people in agriculture continues to decrease. In the 1990s, thirteen per cent were in agriculture, far from the fifty per cent in 1950 (Ramos Gascón 173). Women's opportunities in the work force improved: in 1950, women formed only sixteen per cent of the work force; by 1982, women formed twenty-nine per cent of the work force and thirty-four per cent in 1993 (Brooksbank Jones 74, 78).

Political and economic changes allowed Spain to meet the criteria to join the Economic and Monetary Union in 1997 (Ross 157). Spain now resembles more highly developed countries. This resemblance is recent and parts of the traditional structure are still evident.

One aspect of Spain's modern society is its obsession with politics and sex. Years of extreme censorship and isolation by the Franco regime explain this obsession (Carr 132). During the early years following Franco's death Spain went from a culture with little hope for sexual liberation to one obsessed with nudity and pornography: "Scores of pornographic magazines flooded the newsstands, x-rated films packed movie houses, and plays with nudity in them began to fill Spanish theatres" (Herzberger, "Literary" 188). Politics became a popular topic after Franco's death, with many forms of literature exploring a satirical approach to the transition from a dictatorship to democracy, or focusing on the Civil War (Herzberger, "Literary" 189).

Many other social advances have been made due to these interests. Today contraception is legal. Abortion became legal in 1985 in cases where the mother's life is in danger, the pregnancy is the result of a rape, or the embryo is deformed. Family planning clinics exist in Spain (since the 1980s): there were 641 in 1991 (Davies 184). During the late 1970s Spanish adolescents had advanced in terms of their knowledge of contraception, abortion, and divorce. Although young Spaniards are still in touch with some traditional Spanish ideas, such as Catholicism and living at home, they support some modern ideas. For example, by the late 1970s, half favored legalized abortion, while only fifteen per cent of the elders did (Carr 98). In 1990, a study found that eighty-eight per cent of twenty-five to forty year olds were in favor of contraception, while only seventy-four per cent of the population overall was (Brooksbank Jones 85).

An attitude that has not changed much is the tradition of the woman staying home after getting married. Families in Spain are still founded on marriage. The divorce rate is still lower than in other Western European countries and religion is still important to the family unit (Ramos Gascón 181). One major change, however, in the family is its size, due to women's new rights, more choices, and their ability to have careers outside of the home. From 1960 to 1990 there were fewer marriages and fewer births, reducing the rate of population growth. This caused the birth rate to drop forty per cent in women ages twenty to twenty-four and sixty per cent in women ages forty to forty-four from 1965 to 1986. The size of families went from 2.86 children per family in 1965 to 1.2 children per family in 1994 (Brooksbank Jones 53). The birth rate continues to decrease.

While some Spaniards still retain traditional attitudes towards men and women, the role of the woman (concerning women's rights and gender roles) has evolved. The years since

Franco's death have seen a number of important victories for women, such as the massive incorporation of women into all levels of the work force, especially in urban areas (Carr 86). This significant change in the role that the woman plays in society has been due to a higher level of formal education (rather than domestic education), which has also led to a stronger presence in the employment market and financial independence (Ramos Gascón 183). However, even in the 1990s, only half as many women as men worked outside of the home (Ramos Gascón 185).

The level of legal and social equality enjoyed by Spanish women has risen greatly. The State and the family have changed, from extreme authoritarianism to democracy. While there is still a large number of women who resist the idea of being feminist, many women agree with feminist ideas, desire equal opportunities, and reject social restrictions (Vollendorf 7).

III. The Selected Novels of Carmen Martín Gaite

Existing Criticism

As seen in the review of the historical background, there were many social changes in Spain from 1939 through the 1990s. This study aims to relate them to the way women were portrayed in literature. My analysis of the female protagonists in the chosen novels seeks to determine at what level they are used to reflect the women of those moments, the society in which they lived, and the manner in which women challenged or accepted their rights and/or limitations with respect to the law.

Many articles in literary journals cover similar areas. There is no shortage of publications with Carmen Martín Gaite or her works as the center theme; however, while many critics have studied the selected novels and their author, I have not found a single work that purports to examine my proposed topic in regards to Martín Gaite's novels, *Entre visillos*, *El cuarto de atrás*, and *Nubosidad variable*. Several authors focus on the role of the female

protagonist, sometimes in a particular novel. For example, Marsha Collins in "Inscribing the Space of Female Identity in Carmen Martín Gaite's *Entre visillos*," looks at the importance of place in her novels, "not just as physical locations, but as a *locus mentis*, an emblematic landscape of the mind, heart, and imagination" (66).

Some writers have chosen to focus on the history of Spain and its relation to Martín Gaite's novels. Linda Gould Levine discusses the difficult time for women after the Spanish Civil War in "The Censored Sex: Women as Author and Character in Franco's Spain," but she does not compare three novels from distinct periods as I have done. David K. Herzberger discusses myths in the history of the Franco period and uses Carmen Martín Gaite's *El cuarto de atrás* as an example in "Fiction, History, and Dissent in Francoist Spain." He refers to the protagonist's reflections on her past that are intertwined with the past of Spain:

> Her temporal explorations lead her first to contemplate the stultifying myths of Franco's historiography, then to perceive how she has been deprived of history...instead of inventing new myths that dispute the old ones, she posits a counter discourse in which history is awakened to the fragmented and indeterminate essence of the subjective and is shaped by the many-sided metaphors of her metaphorical backroom. (35-36)

Several authors have chosen to explore the fantasy elements in Martín Gaite's novels. An example of this is Lipman Brown's, "A Fantastic Memoir: Technique and History in *El cuarto de atrás*." She focuses on Martín Gaite's integration of reality and fantasy. Julian Palley also talks about dreamlike fantasies in "Dreams in Two Novels of Carmen Martín Gaite." He writes about the two novels that he finds to be based on the dreams of the protagonist that can be

called "fantastic," *El cuarto de atrás* and *El balneario,* and discusses the ambiguous nature of dream and reality in these works (107).

One of the few works that I have found that studies the three novels to be studied here is Adrián García's "Silence in Carmen Martín Gaite's *Entre visillos, El cuarto de atrás,* and *Nubosidad variable*." This article, however, deals specifically with silence. While I discuss silence in my study, I also discuss other issues.

Many articles about Martín Gaite's other works also exist. For example Lipman Brown offers a unique analysis of all of her short stories which provides an overview of her evolution as a writer in "Martín Gaite's Short Stories, 1953-1974: The Writer's Workshop." She chose to study three periods of Martín Gaite's writing (1953-1954, 1956-1962, and from 1970 to the most modern works) that differ from my selection. But, like my conclusions, she finds that the works she studied are "doubly significant, being as interesting for their historical aspect as for their literary content" (38).

Carmen Martín Gaite was a well-known and accomplished author whose life spanned several distinct moments in Spain's history. With her background as a woman who came of age during Franco's era and as a talented author, she has been able to express the views of the women of the period, the politics and societal aspects of the time, and women's attitudes towards their status in her female protagonists. Since society changed greatly during the Franco regime, one might expect her novel *Entre visillos* (1958) to express a distinct character for the female protagonist due to the limitations on women's rights during this time. In *El cuarto de atrás* (1978) one would then anticipate a divergence from that female protagonist. This novel written after Franco's death reflects the lifting of censorship, the new Spanish Constitution, and new laws that improved the rights and lives of women. In the most modern of the three chosen

novels, *Nubosidad variable* (1992), one would then expect to see even more changes in characters as society continues to modernize.

During the time that Franco ruled in Spain there were virtually no other Western countries in which discrimination against women was as severe as it was in Spain. This is important to understand when addressing the literature of the time and the fact that many of society's problems, especially women's problems, were not represented in literature. Even censorship, however, could not completely prevent artists from exposing the problems of Franco's Spain (Carr 114). The example of Martín Gaite's work from this period, *Entre visillos*, portrays the role of women during that time. It belongs to the neorealist genre prevalent in 1950s which concentrated in particular on social themes and the realistic depiction of life.

Entre visillos

Entre visillos looks at provincial life in Spain during Franco's rule. John Kronik is correct in his comparison of *Entre visillos* with Martín Gaite's preceding novels its "realistic portraiture and critical assessment of post-Civil War social conditions still current in the Spanish narrative two decades after the Republic's defeat" (49). Carmen Martín Gaite uses historical and personal experiences to show the way that the conservatism of post-war Spain opposed women's liberation. [27]

This novel was written at the peak of the Franco era as economic growth was just beginning. It traces the lives of several young women growing up in the provincial Spanish

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[27] Catherine M. Jaffe discusses a similar topic in history in her article, "Patterns of Fiction and Desire: Childhood Reading in Carmen Martín Gaite's *Retahilas*." Here she also "attempts a similar narrative enterprise: to explain the personal through the historical, and the historical through the personal" (184). In this novel, *Retahilas,* there are elements of a post-Franco era. There is a patriarchal hierarchy, restricting women to marriage and representations of "the reactionary powers that through censorship and repression stifled creativity and progress in Spain" (188) and argues "for change at the social level as well as the personal" (198).

town of Salamanca during Franco's authoritarian rule. This resembles Martín Gaite herself, who grew up in Salamanca and was a teenager by the time Franco had established his dictatorship (Carmen Martín Gaite frequently includes autobiographical elements in her fiction) ("El mundo"). Lynn Talbot describes this novel as analyzing "development of the adolescent and 'the quest of the youthful self of identity'" (82). The novel offers many scenes typical of a repressive society. Martín Gaite uses both private (homes, church, an art studio) and public (streets, clubs and bars, school) scenes to demonstrate "the customs, the leisure habits, the tempo, the moral attitudes, the personal conduct of the townspeople" during the era of Franco (Kronik 50). In this way, the novel emphasizes the sole importance of women as wives and mothers, as well as men's objectification of women.

Entre visillos does not have a conventional structure, and it therefore was deemed by Kronik as "plotless."[28] The activity in this novel revolves around the young women's relationships with one another, their families, men, and their goals (traditional or not) in life. The novel is narrated both in first person (by Natalia and Pablo) and by a third person narrator. The protagonists of the novel are two female adolescents, Natalia and Elvira, and Pablo, a teacher.

Natalia is a sixteen-year old girl in high school who hopes to go to college and is encouraged by her teacher, Pablo, but discouraged by her father. She is coming of age and battling societal restrictions. Elvira is a confused young woman who feels suffocated by her life and struggles with her feelings for Pablo, although her fiancé is actually his friend, Emilio. Julia is Natalia's sister who is engaged to a man in Madrid who dislikes, and is disliked by, the family.

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[28] Instead it "shares with the modern novel its loss of confidence in a single, authoritative narrative voice, and for a peremptory reportorial embrace of reality it substitutes an assemblage of private perceptions" (Kronik 52).

Gertru is Natalia's best friend, who becomes engaged to her first suitor, Ángel, a pilot who is attracted to her mainly due to her innocence. Gertru wants to make him happy and he wants her to be the perfect woman. Gertru's older sister models Gertru's future by her present situation. She is unhappily married with children and is depressed. In the novel Martín Gaite shows many unmarried females who want to marry, even though she shows marriage in a poor light. This could be her way of expressing frustration with a society that encourages a life for women that does little to expand their minds or enhance their lives. It may also be meant to draw attention to one of the limited goals for women: the convent or marriage.

Pablo is the teacher who encourages Natalia to continue her education; he is therefore a facilitator for her to move towards her independence. He also feels suffocated by his traditional surroundings and finds comfort in his unconventional friendship with a female performer named Rosa. The self-supported singer is one of few liberated women in the novel and therefore is deemed "loose" by most of society. Although she appears to be liberated, even she dreams of conventional marriage, which is impossible for her, since no man in this society would think of marrying her due to her profession (Pérez, "Carmen" 176). The plot of the novel revolves around the lives of these characters on an everyday basis. With the background of Franco's Spain, marriage is important to and expected of women of the time and therefore forms a significant theme. The novel also presents a picture of the postwar patriarchal society where women are subordinate to men. Collins states that the novel clearly displays this society in which:

> ...a portrait of Francisco Franco reigns supreme and holds vigil over the director, faculty, and students, to the confessional, where the rhetoric and ritual of shame and guilt drive out the demons of deviant female thought and behavior, the

decidedly male voice of power reminds women of their limited place in society. (74)

The women, therefore, struggle with conforming to or resisting the restrictions placed upon them by Franco's society. Several of the women represent the traditional view of women during Franco's regime, while fewer female characters represent a non-traditional role. Mercedes, Julia, and Gertru are the major traditional characters, while Elvira and Natalia have many non-traditional opinions. The former choose to accept their societal positions as obedient wives or girlfriends. For example, most of the conversations between Getru and her mother-in-law deal with cooking or beauty: "ella la guiaba y le decía siempre lo que se tenía que poner a cada hora...Gertru seguía todos sus consejos de belleza porque la oía decir que las mujeres, desde muy jóvenes tiene que prepararse para no envejecer" (238). From this passage and others like it, one can see that the focus of the traditional characters were in domestic areas.

Elvira struggles between conforming and rebelling, while it is clear that the young Natalia resists the conventional norms and expectations of women in society. The non-traditional roles of Natalia, Elvira, and Pablo could be Martín Gaite's way of both representing herself as a non-conforming woman in Franco's society, and giving hope for future change in society. *Entre visillos* ends with the main characters wondering about what the future will bring for them.

As an unconventional young woman in *Entre visillos*, Natalia conflicts with her family's ideas of what she should and should not do. Her sisters disapprove of her dress because she refuses to conform to the expected obsession with appearances (dress, conduct, and reputation) and continues to wear her old knee socks and rain boots. Her friend, Alicia, meets with the disapproval of Natalia's family because she is not of the upper class. Natalia wants to go to

college and has plans to try to convince her father to permit it, unlike Gertru who allows Ángel to convince her to quit school. As we have seen, this idea of requiring permission from a male figure (father or fiancé) is an allusion to the *permiso marital* which stated that a woman needed her husband's permission to do anything outside of the home, and to Article 57 of the Spanish Civil Code which required a woman to obey her husband. Before being married, of course, this power was held by the father. One specific example of Natalia's unconventional character is when Julia, Getru, and her go out one night. Getru seems to be acting strangely to Natalia and speaking differently because her fiancé is there. Natalia responds to one of Getru's comments with, "Qué bobada" (65). Later that night, a man that Natalia does not know begins to flirt with her and she says, "Por Dios, qué disparate...No me conoces a mí" (69).

Natalia and Elvira represent the feelings of imprisonment and escape. As previously stated, Elvira wants to get away from everything. She silences these feelings by escaping into her fantasies. These private fantasies show the real Elvira, but she confines her thoughts to silence, as in the previous fantasy as she gazes from the balcony. Although Natalia is openly nonconformist, most of her feelings remain silent and are recorded in a diary in which she confides through much of the novel. Catherine Bellver, however, acknowledges Natalia's non-traditional ideas by saying: "the way she takes in the entire city with her vision symbolizes her position as a person 'above it all,' not only in the sense of one removed from the banality of her world but also of one about to triumph over its restrictiveness" (44).

Natalia and Elvira belong to a category of protagonists that recur in Martín Gaite's novels. Janet Pérez explains this common character in Martín Gaite's works as follows:

> female adolescents who typify the female rebel, typically more passive than the male, (who) choose passive resistance and secret disobedience...motivating her

> characters and structuring the action are the complex ways in which Spanish society under Franco defined, prescribed, delimited and imposed roles, behavior, and 'appropriate' life-styles because of the male/female division or gender constructs...realistically her characters are trapped by their own physiology or unable to struggle alone against overwhelming odds, some retreating into a fantasy world, while successful attempts at escaping gender constraints usually result from higher education, writing, or other forms of creativity. ("Carmen" 179)

Her recurring defiant protagonist shows how little a woman was able to do in society, not only in the domestic sphere, but also in terms of rebellion. Unlike the later characters in her novels, even the rebellion of these women is suppressed, due to the fear of being ostracized by their family, friends, and community.

The name of the novel, *Entre visillos*, is important because it refers to the non-tradtional characters, as well as to the traditional ones, and how they choose to find their identities when they are silenced by their society. The title refers specifially to those traditional characters who "hide behind the curtains" and do not question the norms of their society. There are also characters that do not "hide behind the curtains" and do not conform to societal expectations.

Years of patriarchal values and poor education left most women unable to escape their domestic role, confined in the house as mother and wife. Martín Gaite comments on the non-traditional protagonists who want to surpass the conventional feminine identity, Natalia and Elvira, in *Desde la ventana*[29] when she explains; "ni Natalia ni Elvira ... viven en un entorno

[29] *Desde la ventana* (1987) consists of four essays by Martín Gaite on the work of Spanish women writers (including Carmen Laforet, Gómez de Avellaneda, Rosalía de Castro, and Mercé Rodereda) (Davies 230).

familiar que cuestione las normas de convivencia habituales, sino todo lo contrario. Y, sin embargo, ellas, cada una a su manera, sí lo hacen. Las dos son chicas raras y su comportamiento está presidido por el inconformismo" (100).

As one of the women who adheres to societal norms and "hides behind the curtains," Julia aims to please her fiancé, Miguel. For example, near the beginning of the novel, she struggles between disappointing her father (the other main authority figure in her life) and Miguel. She wants to visit Miguel in Madrid, but does not want to anger her father and, as she says, "yo no les puedo dar gusto a los dos" (74). Another example is Gertru, who also wants to please her fiancé. She hopes to finish school, but Ángel does not think it is necessary. He says, "para casarte conmigo, no necesitas saber latín ni geometría; conque sepas ser una mujer de tu casa, basta y sobra" (174). He also reassures her that his scolding is something that she would have to learn to deal with and it was to put her in her place: "tú tienes que acostumbrar a que te riña alguna vez...lo hago por tu bien, para enseñarte a quedar siempre en el lugar que te corresponde" (151-152). This correlates with the previously mentioned *Sección Feminina* which focused on preparing women for what it believed was their main goal in life: marriage.

The title is also significant because *Entre visillos* refers to the way the women choose to handle the restrictions that are placed on them in terms of spatial arrangement. In regard to this novel, Martín Gaite argues in *Desde la ventana* that the window could separate the women from the outside world, but it also determines which outlook the woman will take: looking out of the curtains or hiding behind them (36). She continually refers to Natalia and Elvira as needing space and wanting to be free. For example, Elvira confesses to wanting to escape from her life as it is: "me gustaría irme lejos, hacer un viaje largo que durase mucho. Escapar" (136). Elvira and Natalia seem trapped in their world of the demands on the perfect woman. Their choice not

to conform to the societal expectations was not the path taken by the other characters. Marsha Collins explains:

> While all the principal female characters stand *entre visillos*, waiting in the wings for the patriarchal society to fit them with predictable, preassigned masks before they walk out onto the center stage of life, they watch life's spectacle with varied emotions and attitudes, running the gamut from openly hostile resistance to quietly submissive resignation. (66)

Confinement to the domestic space inspired the name of this novel, as well as the next novel in the study, *El cuarto de atrás*. Symbolically, the confinement separates the women from having the same options as the men and being forced into defiance if they choose not to accept their role as women under the Franco society. Structurally and symbolically, the title shows the restriction and silence that lead women to a desire to escape. Those with the desire to escape are the women who expected more, the women who would be first to demand rights after the death of Franco.

In relation to men, the women in *Entre visillos* endure a great amount of restriction and silence. The men have tremendous freedom, while "the norms of decency and respectability bind women to a constrained, circumspect existence designed to preserve the image of unassailable virtue...the female characters squelch any part of their personalities that might promote independence or individuality" (Collins 68). While the men are free to go to bars, have fun, and pursue their education, the women's lives in the novel are mainly focused on how to get the right man, marry him, and make him happy. Many parts of the novel show Pablo, Ángel, and their friends out at night. The careers and the education of the men are important in their lives, such as Pablo's teaching and Emilio and Teo's studies for a competitive exam. On the other

hand, women are not free. They are objectified throughout the novel, moving from being the property of their fathers to that of their husbands after marriage (Pérez 171). As has been pointed out, this is an example of *permiso martial* and Article 57 of the Spanish Civil Code.

The idea of silence is a key aspect in *Entre visillos*. The women are silenced from expressing their opinions and ideas. While Elvira and Natalia use dreams and writing in a diary to release their emotions, the women's only audible release (from silence) appears to be through tears, as Elizabeth Scarlett says:

> ...apart from communicating their constant suffocation, the bodies of these women speak little, mainly with sighs and tears. Tears flow freely, especially when a character mentions a particular man who interests her. Crying is the only discourse other than confession for the expression of (frustrated) desire. (152)

The silencing of the women's true opinions and desires in *Entre visillos* reflects a time in Spanish society when women were silenced in the same way. A woman was expected to respect certain expectations as seen in the novel. Those who tried to dare to be different or expressed their desire to "escape" were looked down upon and ostracized by their community, such as Rosa in *Entre visillos*. One could say that as a young girl hoping for change, Natalia wanted something more than her life was certain to hold, but was reminded of the standards of the time period by her family and friends.

As another way to express silence in the novel, Martín Gaite chooses to leave out a landmark, Salamanca's university, while including the cathedral, the home, and a casino. When the school is mentioned, it is described as grey and forbidding and is compared to a prison (Kronik 50). This silence in regards to education reaffirms that society's priorities in terms of women are not in the educational sphere, while the other three spaces reaffirm the significance of

socializing as a means to find a suitor and the importance of being seen as a pure and proper woman. This relates to the moral and honor codes that usually condemned women to either domestic or religious jobs and that were supported by the *Sección Feminina*. The cathedral represents control and power over the women and is a reminder of the dullness of the lives of the women: "the church marks the hours of the day with its bells and regulates the year with its many religious holidays with a predictable repetition that sets the tone of monotony dominating the provincial city" (Bellver 37). The church also represents the sexual purity expected of women. The home imprisons women within their small, cramped rooms and gives them domestic and repetitive chores (Bellver 36). As a whole, the settings of the novel give a negative impression: "la calle era fea y larga como un pasillo. Empezaban a levantarse las trampas metálicas de algunos escaparates y se descubrían al otro lado del cristal objetos polvorientos y amontonados" (Martín Gaite 14). The examples of silence and the ugly description of their surroundings express the bleak hope women had for their future and their options.

Contrary to the traditional acceptance of Julia, Gertru, and Mercedes, Martín Gaite refers to her characters Elvira and Natalia as being different for their time period in the sense that while they are constricted by societal restraints, they are the ones that resist and desire something extra in their lives than what Franco's rule promised women. They needed to escape, "antes de volver a encerrarse en su casa para seguir desempeñando los papeles de madre y esposa" (102). Again in *Desde la ventana*, Martín Gaite uses the example of Elvira as she gazes outside from the balcony and imagines what life could be like for her:

> Le hubiera gustado ver de golpe a sus pies una gran avenida con tranvías y anuncios de colores, y los transeúntes muy pequeños, muy abajo: que el balcón se fuera elevando y elevando como un ascensor sobre los ruidos de la ciudad

> hormigueante y difícil. Y muchas chicas venderían flores, serían camareras, mecanógrafas, serían médicos, maniquíes, periodistas, se pararían a mirar las tiendas y a tomar una naranjada, sus compañeros de trabajo se perderían entre los transeúntes, irían a tomar un tranvía para llegar a su barrio que estaría muy lejos. (102)

Even the atmosphere of the town seems to suffocate Elvira: "Solamente uno que vive aquí metido puede llegar a resignarse con las cosas que pasan aquí, y hasta puede llegar a creer que vive y que respira. ¡Pero yo no! Yo me ahogo, yo no me resigno, yo me desespero" (55). The feelings of suffocation are a direct commentary on her feelings of confinement, physically, mentally, and socially. And her insistence on "yo" reveals her desire to be different from those who are resigned to this life. She is conscious of her independent nature and will not yield even if she is the only one who refuses.

Time is also an essential ingredient of *Entre visillos*. Time seems to work against the characters, with the pressures that it represents. According to Kronik:

> ... time is rendered useless by the absurdity of its pressures: Isabel, for example, is supposed to rush home to bake lemon cookies (15). On the other hand, time renders useless the events that fill it: the cathedral clock is heard striking, but only because it is set to strike every quarter hour. The constant reminders of the hour underscore the threat of petty obligations and routine that hangs over the heads of the characters. (56)

Martín Gaite uses time in this way in her novel to emphasize the way that the era is not changing: time may be moving, but nothing positive is happening for the women. The novel's several different narrators and characters make it necessary for the reader to piece together the

fragments of the story that are different images in time. These different images exist to show that the situation of this woman was not an isolated one and that all women were facing heavy restraints.

Natalia and Elvira use their rooms as a refuge, dreaming or writing, from a world that has "appropriated the family space and transformed it into a training ground to indoctrinate women into blind acceptance of passive, normative roles" (Collins 73). The lack of space for women to express their thoughts and feelings and the periods in the novel when the women are silenced represent the repression that women faced during Franco's regime. Despite the fact that this novel demonstrates how women were discriminated against during this time, Martín Gaite does so without saying negative things about Franco. This subtlety is directly related to the amount of censorship during this period. Martín Gaite recognized that although she does not say anything directly about Franco, the readers (present and future) would understand the situation, and relate the events of the novel to the social, economic, and political situation.

El cuarto de atrás

Since *Entre visillos* was published in the middle of the Franco era, the portrayal of women and their relationships with men in the narrative is not surprising. The expected changes in the portrayal of women in these areas in a post-Franco novel are evident in *El cuarto de atrás*. This novel was written after the abolition of censorship and therefore it is able to express themes that could not be discussed during Franco's era. Once democracy had replaced the dictatorship of Franco, there was a strong current of feminist novels (emerging at a time when many women writers in general appeared) (Ramos Gascón 314). It is true, as Debra Castillo maintains, that

"*El cuarto de atrás* signals a new stage in her literary production," but is still autobiographical as "a work faithful to the details of (her) life" (814).[30]

As the first novel to be written by Martín Gaite after the Franco era, *El cuarto de atrás* was therefore her first novel not subjected to the threat of censorship. This made it possible to explore areas that were previously prohibited. As Lipman Brown states, "through the use of the fantastic mode, the author approaches the real social history of Civil War and postwar Spain, as she experienced it" ("Fantastic" 13).[31]

The plot is simple, but again unconventional. The novel is written in the first person, dictated by a well-known author, with the same initials as Carmen Martín Gaite. She receives a late night phone call from a male critic named Alejandro (whom she refers to as the "el hombre de negro") who requests an immediate interview with her. Before he appears, she sees a cockroach, which she later discovers, has the same eyes as the man (Lipman Brown, "Fantastic" 14). A man, presumably Alejandro, arrives at the home of the narrator and proceeds with the interview even though the woman writer is clearly exhausted. During the interview, she relives memories of her life under Franco (that can now be expressed due to his death) to the male interrogator. Due to the insomnia that she had been fighting when the interviewer called, she struggles to remain fully conscious of her situation, leaving the reader to decide if she is awake

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[30] Although Castillo's main concern throughout her article is "the forms of writing and function of memory," she offers many ideas about Martín Gaite's personal history under Franco being a part of *El cuartro de atrás* (815).

[31] Servodidio notes that Martín Gaite's *El cuarto de atrás* and *El balneario* are the exceptions to her other works. Her remaining works are "firmly rooted in the conventions of realistic prose, the image of humankind they contain is necessarily circumscribed by what the subjects reveal, by way or word or deed, in a fully conscious state." (117). On the contrary, *El cuarto de atrás* and *El balneario*, while historically accurate, give intimate personal thoughts by way of dream and fantasy and the implications that can be made from them (117).

or dreaming while she recounts her memories and talks about her work. It is therefore also difficult to know if the man was real or a figment of the narrator's imagination, and if he was Alejandro or someone else.

With the interviewer she discusses her next work, which appears to be growing mysteriously in length by itself. Although Alejandro wants to know as much as possible about the writer's next work, much of their conversation centers around Franco's death, as "the narrator both recalls and avoids recalling Franco, closing off the historical epoch while bringing to light the hidden counter history of the period" (Castillo 816). In the second chapter of *El cuarto de atrás* the narrator already has difficulty deciding if she should tell the interviewer that "la felicidad en los años de guerra y postguerra era inconcebible, que vivíamos rodeados de ignorancia y represión" (69). This shows that while the narrator wants to talk about her past, she has difficulty expressing it and needs guidance from the man. By the end of the novel, however, the narrator no longer needs the interviewer. She has evolved from dependence on a man to confidence in her own voice - a change that symbolizes the woman's move toward independence after the Franco era.

While the narrator is talking about her past and her work, she and the man are interrupted by a phone call from the journalist's jealous female companion, Carola. After speaking extensively with Carola, the protagonist returns to talk to Alejandro. At the end of the novel, the narrator's daughter wakes her mother, leaving room to speculate if the story was a dream, memory, or reality. The break from the conversation and the narrator being awakened by her daughter contain elements of intimacy, discussed later in this study.

Some of the important themes of the novel are the Franco regime, space, silence, and memory. As Pérez reaffirms, Martín Gaite's writing and her personal experience are intertwined

throughout the novel ("Contemporary" 15). Many of Martín Gaite's memories of the Franco regime concern the constraints that women faced, and these are seen in her numerous descriptions in *El cuarto de atrás.* These political and social ideas (introduced in this novel for the first time without the restraint of censorship) were more subtle in her previous works including *Entre visillos*) (Lipman Brown, "Fantastic" 15). Besides referring to the education of young women in Spain in *El cuarto de atrás,* Martín Gaite describes every aspect of the daily life of the ideal Falangist wife and mother, and the relation of women to men in the Franco era. She describes the ideal woman during this time as, "el heroísmo abnegado de madres y esposas...la importancia de su silenciosa y oscura labor como pilares del hogar cristiano" (93).

Growing up, the narrator rejects these ideas, realizing that the ideal woman promoted by the *Sección Femenina* could only be achieved by submitting to the predetermined destiny of the smiling, silent women. In this sense, she is similar to the protagonists of *Entre visillos*, Natalia and Elvira. Martín Gaite uses herself as a model for the main characters of her novels. For example, she negatively remembers her days of training with the *Sección Femenina*:

> La retórica de la posguerra se aplicaba a desprestigiar los conatos de feminismo que tomaron auge en los años de la República y volvía a poner el acento en el heroísmo abnegado de madres y esposas, en la importancia de su silenciosa y oscura labor como pilares del hogar cristiano. Todas las arengas que monitores y camaradas nos lanzaban en aquellos locales inhóspitos, mezcla de hangar y de cine de pueblo, donde cumplí a regañadiente el Servicio Social, cosiendo dobladillos, haciendo gimnasia y jugando al baloncesto, se encaminaban, en definitivo, al mismo objetivo: a que aceptásemos con alegría y orgullo, con una constancia a prueba de desalientos, mediante una conducta sobria que ni la más

> mínima sombra de maledicencia fuera capaz de enturbiar, nuestra condición de mujeres fuertes, complemento y espejo del varón. (93-94)

The narrator also feels free to speak vividly about the events that occurred under Franco's dictatorship, including her uncle's murder and the imprisonment of her best friend's parents (real events in the life of Martín Gaite). She makes sure to explain that deprivation, both physical and intellectual, was common in Franco's era (Lipman Brown "Fantastic" 16). Her insistence in discussing the Franco regime is similar to that in *Entre visillos*. Her approach, however, is different. In *Entre visillos* she was forced to describe the situation without any negative comments about the Franco regime because of censorship. The reader has to infer the woman's place in society and the restrictions that were placed upon her. In *El cuarto de atrás*, the narrator gives a clear picture of the restrictions on women, their role in society, and the struggles they faced. To do this, she reflects on negative memories that she has of that era, expressing thoughts that would not have been permitted if censorship were still in effect. As we have seen, this was possible due to the new Constitution of 1978 that eradicated censorship. The change in the female protagonist in *El cuarto de atrás* from that of *Entre visillos* is also due to the new rights and opportunities for women in education and the workplace.

The images of memory in *El cuarto de atrás* are similar to those in *Entre visillos* in the sense that both fragment time, leaving the reader to put together the sequence. They are different in that this sense of memory has become more complex and sophisticated. This shows the change in the complexity of the women of the time as well. Kronik agrees, saying:

> ... if *Entre visillos*, a product of its historical moment and of its author's initiation into the art of novelizing, is an early announcement of these interests, in her recent *El cuarto de atrás*, a product of another time and of a mature writer, they

> reach their culmination. That novel or narrative hybrid (is) again the fruit of imagined conversations. (59)

It was an unhappy time, especially for women, although they were the ones who were expected (as learned through the *Sección Feminina*) to be cheerful and happy at all times. The narrator remembers, "la felicidad en los años de guerra y postguerra era inconcebible, que vivíamos rodeados de ignorancia y represión...[propulsados por] aquellos deficientes libros de texto que bloquearon nuestra enseñanza" (69). The narrator explains that it was in those times that she chose to use fantasy to escape from the silence that was forced upon women in her society (Lipman Brown "Fantastic" 17). Although she also adds that this was not looked upon as appropriate, "quedarse, conformarse y aguantar era lo bueno; salir, escapar y fugarse era lo malo" (125). Ferrán notes that Martín Gaite defies the ideas of the *Sección Feminina* that a woman is not as intelligent and creative as a man, with her affirmation of the creative capacity of the women and her capacity to create an autobiographical character as the narrator (102).

Martín Gaite uses her creativity to combine dreams and fantasies with Spain's history. This trip through the past with a mixture of reality and fantasy typifies "her response to the constraints of civil war and post-civil war Spain" (Castillo 818). For example, Alejandro, whose existence is ambiguous and lends an element of fantasy, plays the role of the interlocutor and encourages the narrator to free herself from the limitations of the real world. These limitations represent those of the Franco era, and fantastic images of the novel aim to encourage women to free themselves from this silence and restraints now that Franco is gone.

Martín Gaite's creation of the interlocutor is important to *El cuarto de atrás*, because it helps the narrator to tell her story, but it also recurrs in other works by the author.[32] The interlocutor, Alejandro, is also like an external reader in many ways: "he arrives uninvited, asks questions without inhibition, enjoys the comforts of domesticity such as drinking tea and sitting comfortably on the couch, and leaves at the end" (Garlinger 240).

The interlocutor is also like an external reader because the narrator never really learns much about him. Throughout the interview, Alejandro and the narrator talk about her and her life. He is her guide into her past during the Franco regime. His presence as an interviewer makes the protagonist tell her story which otherwise may not have been told:

> It is only through his probing questions, gentle criticism of her previous works, non-patronizing enthusiasm and gift of a pill that loosens the reins of her memory that she is able to pull back the curtains that hide her rich imagination, that metaphorical back room and recreate her adolescence and theories of writing. When we consider the significance of this supportive role that the man in black fulfills, it becomes clear that Martín Gaite is radically reversing the traditional concept of inspiration and guidance in European fiction. (Gould Levine, "Carmen" 162)

While there is an interlocutor in this novel who aids with the escape from silence and the expression of ideas, there is no such interlocutor in *Entre visillos*. Those women lacked this symbolic release from restraints, and were therefore silenced by them.

As the interlocutor, Alejandro theoretically allows the narrator to enter the back room for

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[32] More information about the interlocutor can be found in Martín Gaite's *La busqueda de interlocutor y otras busquedas*.

which the novel is named. She may have needed assistance in finding this back room because people of this time were used to hiding their negative thoughts of Franco; therefore, it was difficult to unveil the painful memories that had been suppressed for so long. One example of how Alejandro helps to get information from the narrator is when he gives her a pill to ease the release of information:

> Sacaron las fichas de un cajoncito lateral, la tapa se deslizaba metiendo la uña en una muesca, eran verdes, amarillas azules y rojas. "Si te da igual, yo me pido las verdes," dijo Peque; a mí me daba igual...Abro la boca y me deposita en la lengua, la traga con un poco de té...Luego saca una verde y se la toma él. (107)

As Lipman Brown explains, "the fantastic interaction thus makes easier the retrieval of perturbing forgotten memories" ("Fantastic" 19). In *El cuatro de atrás*, their conversation is converted into a narrative by the end of the novel. Unlike the main characters of *Entre visillos,* the protagonist of this novel uses a creative outlet to portray her outlook on the women who grew up in Franco's Spain, symbolizing her new role as the liberated woman (El Saffar 195). *Entre visillos* does not end like this because during that time, there was no place for creative women in society. They were not yet liberated.

In the novel, the back room was actually two different rooms. One was the tangible back room that was a part of the home in which the narrator lived during the Civil War. It represented the freedom that the people lost with the beginning of the war (Ferrán 105). The narrator describes this back room: "era muy grande y en él reinaban el desorden y la libertad...era un reino donde nada estaba prohibido" (187). The other back room was a theoretical room where all of the things were "in their place": to be "in their place" to the narrator meant that they were "outside of their place." This is a reflection on the postwar woman, who was supposed to stay

"in her place," the home (Ferrán 105). The situation is ironic because the two rooms deal with one another: one room (where women were no longer "in their place" in the home) parodies the other (which is in the past and forced women into confinement). The narrator describes how she has to be in the theoretical back room when she starts to write:

> el libro sobre la postguerra tengo que empezarlo en un momento de iluminación como el de ahora, relacionando el paso de la historia con el ritmo de los sueños, es un panorama tan ancho y tan revuelto, como una habitación donde cada cosa está en su sitio precisamente al haberse salido de su sitio, todo parte de mis primeras perplejidades frente al concepto de historia, allí, en el cuarto de atrás, rodeada de juguetes y libros tirados por el suelo. (104)

This time and place in the back room where she can begin to write her novel about the postwar time in Spain correlates to the historical tangible back room of her childhood. By intertwining the two back rooms, she is able to use her creativity to combine reality and fantasy to write her own version of Franco's era. She uses metafictional aspects such as the mysterious growth of the novel as she talks about her life under Franco. Her novel is complete by the end of her narrative (Ferrán 105).

The protagonist explains in *El cuarto de atrás* how she took shelter from oppression through literature. She describes how she used to read the *novelas rosa* when she was young (El Saffar 186). Martín Gaite combines reality and fantasy with parodies of these popular woman's romance novels from Franco's era to critique "the romance-novel addict offer(ing) a pertinent reflection of the protagonist of this novel" (Castillo 821). In *El cuarto de atrás*, Lipman Brown specifically notes that there is a mystery about what is fiction and what is reality, saying "the reader considers the fictional world as real; the reader and the narrator share a hesitation over

whether or not what they perceive derives from commonly-held perceptions of reality" ("Fantastic" 15).

The protagonist in *El cuarto de atrás* formulates the realization that the *novela rosa* had an influence on her: "es difícil escapar a los esquemas literarios de la primera juventud, por mucho que más tarde se reniegue de ellos" (Jaffe 141). The protagonist's conversations with Alejandro explain how Martín Gaite feels about the *novela rosa* and why she parodies them:

> passions that aroused her adolescent imagination were insubstantial by their very nature, empty of content even when they were not violently consuming her. The emptiness is one that infects life and literature equally. Time reveals the vacuity of the gestures, the sighs, the hyperbole, the dreams around which lovers in particular turn in their endless games of failed hopes and mute incomprehension. (El Saffar 187)

This novel deviates from its predecessor in the sense that the *novela rosa* as a romance story always ends with love or marriage. On the other hand, *El cuarto de atrás*, does not end in love or marriage between man and woman. The only love at the end is between the protagonist and her daughter. The most important aspect of *El cuarto de atrás*, however, is the new idea of independence. Elizabeth Ordoñez finds independence in all areas: "reading, telling, interpretation, and reinscription of traditional texts through their recombination in new environments" ("Talking" 99). As she describes it, "in many ways, *El cuarto de atrás* represents a successful attempt to at once preserve attractive aspects of a traditional female literary culture and to break out of bondage from its more restrictive features" ("Talking" 92). In doing so, it makes it possible for the author to fulfill the character's need for autonomy, and an image of

themselves that they could look at peacefully (Pérez, "Carmen" 171). The independence from the *novela rosa* symbolizes the independence of women that occurred during this period.

This idea of independence is also relevant to the silence and space of the novel. The spatial frame of *Entre visillos* confines women and allows men to be free. Bellver describes her view on this idea: "the masculine has been imagined as temporal dynamism and the feminine has been conceived basically as space: as the container and the contained. Man moves through space while woman is confined within it" (33). *El cuarto de atrás*, nevertheless, does not rely on the love and marriage between man and women. Instead, it concentrates on the female narrator's own reflections and thoughts as the basis of the novel she is writing. As the interviewer guides her to remember the back room from her past, she discusses it, representing the independence from the confinement and silence of women in the Franco era. Since this novel was published in the same year that the new Spanish Constitution was written, and shortly after the death of Franco, one could say that this novel, creating a "new version" of the *novela rosa* by parodying it, is also creating a new outlook for women by representing the "new version" of women now that the Franco era was over.

Through her text, the narrator displays several polarities that represent the conflicting forces in the novel: "memory and forgetfulness, history and literature, true and false, reality and fantasy – polarities that, in a post-Franco compensatory adjustment for a half-century of literary deprivation, are suddenly, ambiguously, fleeing together in a celebration of riches" (Castillo 822). By the end of the novel there are great changes in two of the most important concerns presented at the beginning of the story: comfort and intimacy.

In the beginning, the woman feels safe and comfortable in the familiar space of her home, which creates a sense of intimacy in the novel that was not seen in *Entre visillos*. This changes

once the intimacy of her home and own identity are disrupted during the evening's events. For example, a cockroach appears which frightens her; the narrator feels uncomfortable reliving her past in the presence of a stranger; she takes the pills that the interviewer offers to her; and she realizes that her book seems to be writing itself as her stack of papers grows and grows. Garlinger agrees that these are all signs of an irruption of the fantastic within the familiar space inhabited by the narrator (242).

Even their style of discussion is polarized, contributing to their difficulty in communication that also affects the narrator's decreasing level of comfort and intimacy. While the narrator chooses to submerge herself in her story, of both her novel and her memories, Alejandro demands explanations and seems to be more concerned with the theoretical (Ordoñez, "Talking" 93). For example, when the narrator uses the word *ambigüedad,* he interjects with, "La ambigüedad es la clave de la literatura de misterio," (qtd. in Ordoñez, "Talking" 93-94). She speaks more than he does during their dialogs. From this one can find that she is attempting to regain her sense of comfort by befriending Alejandro. This changes the persona of the man, causing him to be more like the narrator. This signifies the end of women's reliance on men during this era and their new reliance on themselves. Patrick Paul Garlinger agrees when he notes the significance of her discussion of the back room again in that it represents a familiar intimate space.[33] The narrator achieves this sense of intimacy at the end of the novel when the two cease to be extreme opposites in terms of communication and interpretation. According to Ordoñez:

> The male seems to become influenced by the woman's experiences with literary

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[33] In many of Martín Gaite's novels intimacy, in terms of friendship, family, and domesticity, correlates to the arrangement of space (Garlinger 242).

> texts and other cultural discourses. He becomes more feminized, more sensitive to the pleasures of communication and the details of female history and culture: he appears genuinely interested in the narrator's observations of popular female film stars and political figures, in how girls curled their hair during the postwar period, and later he is visibly moved by the narrator's disclosure of how her childhood experiences became the source for her tale of the imaginary Island of Bergai. Our final image of the man is as an essentially encouraging and supportive figure, even as a solicitous and maternal figure, as he helps the narrator lie down, arranges a pillow beneath her head, and gently caresses her forehead. (95)

As the male becomes more feminine, the intimacy and familiarity in the domestic space of the home begin to return. For example, he makes her feel more comfortable: "me ayuda a subir las piernas al sofá, me pone un almohadón debajo de la cabeza. Me dejo hacer dócil y voluptuosamente" (200). Once the narrator awakens at the end of the novel and sees her daughter (the interviewer is gone), the intimate and familiar feel of the home is complete with the maternal feeling (Garlinger 242).

The disturbance of intimacy in the novel correlates with the sexuality that also comes forth. For example, the nearness of the narrator and Alejandro emits eroticism and his feminine feelings (which cause the reader to question his sexual orientation) raise the level of sexuality in the novel (Garlinger 242). One example of the intimacy between the two is when the narrator jumps into the arms of Alejandro with surprise after the wind blows the door of the terrace open: "Siento su pecho latiendo contra el mío, sus manos sobre mi pelo que el viento alborota. Cierro los ojos, estoy temblando" (199).

One can find that the feminine qualities of the man and the intimacy shared by the mother and daughter are important in this novel because they take the place of the typical intimacy seen in the *novela rosa* between man and woman. This is an example of the way that Martín Gaite parodied this type of novel by using intimacy, but also by incorporating sexuality and emphasizing the importance of a relationship between women. This blatent sexuality is an example of a subject that could not have been a topic under the Franco era; therefore, even the mention of sexuality shows the change in the post-Franco society and the effects of the new Spanish Constitution.

Also important is the way that the female is presented in the novel. The author incorporates the role of the reader to present the role of the female and the male. The type of reader the character represents describes their position in society. For example, women readers during the Franco period may have been represented by women who constantly read *novelas rosa*; whereas the male readers read more difficult and complex works. This novel shows a change from the previous era because the narrator is able to play the role of an aware and experienced reader. The jealous female companion of Alejandro, Carola, plays a different role, more one that is similar to a reader of *novelas rosa*, a more simple character. Ordoñez claims that this simplistic comparison makes Carola represent "conventions of an average reading public, especially those of the average female reader" ("Talking" 96).

The qualities of a text that the "average female reader," such as Carola, dislikes and does not comprehend are those that a well-informed, intelligent reader, such as Alejandro or the narrator, finds pleasing. Alejandro has an extensive literary background and an expert knowledge of the writer's work, also making him the ideal critic (Lipman Brown, "Fantastic" 15). But as the male changes throughout the novel, so does Carola. She becomes more complex

through her use of literary allusions that the narrator interprets. For example when she says, "¡Qué sabrá usted lo que es una pasión!" (151), the narrator interprets the phrase in a cultural sense as the words of a famous singer. This can be interpreted to show the evolution of the women in Spanish society in terms of reading and education during the Franco era until the present time of the novel. Together, Corola and the narrator form a female identity that resists the repression of women (Ordoñez, "Talking" 97).

The novel "provides a forceful commentary on what constitutes a successful text by and about women, especially a woman in the process of generating her own text" (Ordoñez, "Talking" 99). Martín Gaite's novel focuses on similar themes relative to the novel's place in history. As Spain discovered its newfound independence and the women's movement regained its momentum in the late 1970s after Franco's death, Martín Gaite's female protagonist takes on a new image compared to her postwar novel, *Entre visillos.*

The narrator in *El cuarto de atrás* writes the beginning of the story we have just finished reading at the end of the novel. The symbolic joining of beginning and end suggests a fulfillment in this work that *Entre visillos* lacks (El Saffar 191). The narrator is able to surpass her fear (of the cockroach, the interviewer, his questions, the answers that made her look at her past), "her fear of finding a real-life lover, her fear of madness, her fear of following too far the thread of literature, the fear of getting lost" (El Saffar 193). She answers the questions and conquers her fear, and becomes a liberated woman. In *Entre visillos*, the author may not have provided the same sense of fulfillment because the limitations on women during that time did not leave much opportunity for women to lead a fulfilling life.

The change in women is evident during the time period of *El cuarto de atrás* (1970s) from the Franco era, when women were finally able to fulfill their goals and desires in life, an

impossibility for many women under Franco. As already noted, this is a change from her novel *Entre visillos*, where the two main characters did not meet their goals and desires by the end of the novel. Pablo's conversations with them stimulated both desire for a relationship (in Elvira) and for education (in Natalia). But at the end of the novel, Natalia had not yet found a definite way to continue her education and Elvira was not with Pablo. Pablo leaves Salamanca at the end of the novel, with both of the girls still unsatisfied (El Saffar 192).

Nubosidad variable

Further change is found in the most recent of Martín Gaite's novels in this study, *Nubosidad variable*. This novel was published in 1992, well after the transformation of Spain into a democracy after many years of a dictatorship under Franco. Like the first two novels studied, the plot is not conventional. It looks at the lives of two former friends who have spent the last thirty years apart. The two women rotate as first-person narrators. The women discover that they are now very different. One woman, Mariana León, is an unmarried professional, with a career as a psychiatrist. The other, Sofía Montalvo, is an unhappily married wife with three children and unachieved aspirations. They appear to have nothing in common, but, they discover in their letters that they share frustrations in life.

Sofía is dissatisfied, bored, and has overall negative self-esteem. She views herself only in relation to others (as mother and wife). Her timidity adds to these feelings (Pérez, "Nubosidad" 307):

> La depresión que se me acentuó a raíz de la reforma del cuarto de baño – aunque ya la venía padeciendo de mucho más atrás en modalidad de desgana generalizada – le ha debido dar (al marido) pretexto últimamente para hablar de mí como 'la

> pobre Sofía, dejando traslucir mi edad crítica y mi incapacidad de adaptación al medio. (82)

Her husband, Eduardo, uses every chance to humiliate her and does not love her anymore, as Amelia, her daugher, tells her. Sofía is aware that Eduardo is having an affair. She has three grown children: Amelia (the youngest), Encarna (the eldest), and Lorenzo (between the two in age). While Amelia lives on her own, Encarna and Lorenzo live in *el refugio,* the apartment inherited from their grandmother. Sofía's life is a reflection of the feelings of inferiority of women that were left over from the Franco era, as it would be difficult for women suppressed their entire lives to immediately feel equal when rights were established.

Mariana is in many ways very similar to Sofía. She is also dissatisfied and frustrated with her life. At the beginning of the novel, like Sofía with her husband, Mariana is deeply affected by men. She becomes intimate with one of her patients, Raimundo, a suicidal writer who confesses his homosexual feelings to her. Mariana acts as if her intimacy with him were an attempt to cure him of these feelings. Her past relationship with Manolo is also a common topic in her letters, as well as an earlier one with Guillermo (who also had an amorous relationship with Sofía).

The letters grow increasingly personal and confessional. With the new interaction between the two, they are forced to remember experiences in their lives that they had shut away, such as the shared interest in Guillermo, which ended their friendship. They also are forced to reexamine their own feelings and issues as they reconstruct their friendship. At the end of the novel, Mariana is at a hotel on the beach, reflecting on her life. It has been weeks since anyone from work has spoken to her. While she is there, she has a rather unsatisfying visit with Manolo. Sofía is at *el refugio*, recuperating after hearing a phone call between her husband and his

mistress. Both are in a time of need and finally meet at a restaurant near Mariana's hotel. They read over the letters they have written to each other and the notebooks they have kept. The novel closes when a storm appproaches, forcing them to find shelter inside the restaurant. One piece of paper escapes from their piles and the waiter catches it. The rain runs the letters of one of the words, but he can see that the other is "NUBOSIDAD" in capital letters.

Like *El cuarto de atrás, Nubosidad variable* takes places in the present. Martín Gaite uses two female narrators and their perspectives to tell the story that revisits the patriarchal society that confines women, such as the marriage between Sofía and Eduardo. She again emphasizes the double standard in society, by focusing on "the study of male-female relationships, courtship and erotic rituals, and the theme of heterosexual love" (Pérez, "Nubosidad" 302). The idea of intimacy is important to the expression of this secondary story.

The women in the novel use phrases and words that have special sentimental meaning in intimate relationships (friends, lovers, mother-child). After years of lost contact, Sofía and Mariana rebuild their friendship using phrases and words that signify their shared experiences and mutual history. For example, they have a ritual of describing the place where they are writing their letters and calling their writing, "homework." The relationship between Sofía and her children reveals the same intimacy in certain moments of the novel. For example, the character "Noc," that Encarna and Sofía made up one summer on a family vacation, is referred to at the end of the novel at the "refugio." Although the relationship between Manolo and Mariana is over, it still maintains a hint of intimacy that can be seen with their shared knowledge of the importance of Manolo's painting, given to Mariana as a gift and entitled *Nubes de despedida*.

The idea of intimacy is similar to that of *El cuarto de atrás*, and like it, shows progression from *Entre visillos*. The intimacy that is portrayed in *Nubosidad variable* is difficult

for the characters to maintain and not entirely comforting. Even though it often becomes awkward and uncomfortable, many protagonists in Martín Gaite's novels yearn for this intimacy. Shared interests (writing and reading) and the need for communication form bonds between the feminized Alejandro and the narrator in *El cuarto de atrás*, much as a close relationship is reestablished between Sofía and Mariana (Garlinger 234).

Sofía and Mariana have difficulty with the traditional intimacy with a man that the protagonist in *El cuarto de atrás* also finds problematic. Sofía's troubled relationship with her husband and her domestic space interferes with true intimacy. The obvious example is her husband's affair. But also, the problem that she has with the neighbor concerning the plumbing shows an intrusion in her home. Although the relationship between Sofía and Mariana was originally disturbed by eroticism (their shared interest in Guillermo), their similar problems make them want to restart their friendship.

At the end of the novel, their lost friendship is successfully rebuilt. This intimacy is symbolized by the style of writing in the last chapter. Previously, Sofía or Mariana were the narrators for alternating chapters. The last chapter is a combination of both of their writings (Garlinger 244). This intimacy includes only a non-sexual relationship, since the male figures that the women love (or loved) have disappeared by the end of the novel. Pérez agrees: "Romantic love, matrimony, and/or erotic attraction – having proven insufficient – are replaced by close relationships based upon mutual interests and near-perfect communication" ("Carmen" 176).

The end of *Nubosidad variable* forms non-sexual intimacy between two women, as well as the recuperation of the intimacy between Sofía and her daughter Encarna. These intimacies are similar to those at the end of *El cuarto de atrás*. This suggests that Martín Gaite wants to

show that a woman's need for intimacy (through expression of true feelings) could be better found in a non-sexual relationship. She also indicates that happiness for a woman is not necessarily found in a love affair, but in a close platonic relationship. Encarna also serves a symbol of the importance of close friendships between women, similar to the childhood friend of the narrator in *El cuarto de atrás*. This is a change from *Entre visillos*, because the lives of the traditional women in the novel centered on finding the most intimate relationship they knew: marriage. They held this in greater esteem than other relationships, such as friendship. *Nubosidad variable* corresponds with a time period that has seen such changes as the liberalization of divorce laws (1982) and changes in the Spanish Constitution that made women equals with their husbands with regard to their children and domestic life (1981). Since women were working outside of the home more than during the periods of the two previously studied novels (such as Mariana in this novel), it is easy to see the origin of the sense of independence from men and in society.

Like *El cuarto de atrás*, *Nubosidad variable* differs from *Entre visillos*, in that it was written without the restrictions of censorship. As was previously mentioned, *Entre visillos* describes life under Franco, but due to censorship, it does did not say anything explicitly negative about the era. In *El cuarto de atrás,* Martín Gaite was free to use her personal experiences to express the negatives and to criticize the Franco era. In *Nubosidad variable,* the author is again free to discuss any topic that she wishes. Although she seems to move on from discussing the Franco era at great length as in *El cuarto de atrás* (seventeen years have passed since Franco's death), she discusses other areas that would not have been acceptable during the Franco regime. Some of the topics that come up in the novel would have been censored under Franco. Homosexuality (which is also present in *El cuarto de atrás*), drugs and adultery, which

are all present in *Nubosidad variable*, could not have been represented in a novel under Franco. Other examples of new topics are: the homosexual feelings of Mariana's patient, Raimundo; the existence of drugs in the *refugio*; Sofía's encounters with Lorenzo's friend, Antonio, who is "coming down" from the use of a drug; and Lorenzo's bisexuality.

The lack of censorship allows Martín Gaite to include these topics. But *Nubosidad variable* goes even further into previously prohibited areas than *El cuarto de atrás*:

> ... 'new' elements including the up-to-date chronology of the re-encounter and abundant reflections of changes wrought in Spanish life by the liberties of the post-Franco era, the country's participation in the European common market and consequent prosperity, changes which are a two-edged sword, undetermining the family structure, subverting traditional value, bring a widespread counter-culture of drugs, homosexuality, rootlessness, and urban violence. (Pérez, "Nubosidad" 312)

This new freedom is clearly seen in the characters' actions: Sofía leaves her husband (for an undetermined amount of time), several characters express their homosexual feelings[34], several characters in *el refugio* openly experiment with drugs, and Mariana pursues a professional career that would have been only for a man in the past.

Throughout the novel, Mariana and Sofía find themselves enclosed in their letters to each other and in their internal monologues. Although they are expressing their emotions and inner secrets, Pérez feels that this "accentuates solitude and frustrated communication" ("Nubosidad"

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[34] Homosexuality is also briefly mentioned in *Entre visillos*, in the minor role of Teresa (the sister of the bourgeois sculpter, Yoni), and in *El cuarto de atrás*, when Alejandro asks if the narrator and her childhood friend were lesbians. These brief exhibitions lead to the full openness about homosexuality in *Nubosidad variable*.

304).[35] Sofía comments that with her frustration, her writing is her "única tabla de salvación" (56). Mariana says that other people bore her, they do not listen to her, and her patients never change: "lo malo es que no encuentro con quién hablar" (319), and like Sofía, she finds writing to be her only form of expression. By the end of the novel, both Sofía and Mariana leave the situations that are silencing, frustrating, and suffocating them. They go, physically and mentally, to a place where they can express themselves, to escape. Even the name *el refugio* signals that it was a place to which Sofía could escape. Both women leave their once comforting homes to find each other, as their familiar homes and relationships no longer provide the emotional comfort they want (Garlinger 241).

The spatial arrangement of the novel is important because, like that of the other novels studied, it refers to a way of escaping, but also to a way of retrieving memories. The back room was a place that held many memories for the protagonist in *El cuarto de atrás*. Martín Gaite uses this same spatial symbol in *Nubosidad variable* when Sofía describes her thought process of recovering her memories:

> Pensar es ir saltando de una habitación en otra sin ilación aparente, estancias del presente y del pasado, algunas aún accesibles, otras cerradas para siempre o derruidas, nuestras o no, tan pronto morada estable como refugio eventual del que solamente quedó un olor o una sombra movediza proyectada en el techo...Los recuerdos están repartidos por habitaciones que el pensamiento visita cuando se le antoja, a un ritmo imprevisible, ajeno a nuestras riendas. Pensar es ir saltando de

[35] Other characters in novels by Martín Gaite share this idea, such as Eulalia in *Retahílas* (Pérez, "Nubosidad" 304).

> una en otra, y a esta aventura, si os veis embarcados en ella, no le pidáis razones cronológicas. (195)

In the past, women could not speak their minds; therefore, the characters in this novel rebel against the past by revealing themselves through talking and not through actions (Pérez, "Nubosidad" 310). In *Entre visillos*, the rebellious women protested with discrete actions and little vocal action. However, in *El cuarto de atrás* and *Nubosidad variable*, the opposite is true. During the time period of the first novel, women were silenced in their opinions, whereas in the latter two novels, it becomes more acceptable for women to speak their minds; it is as though they have found their voice. Like in the other two novels, the women of *Nubosidad variable* use fantasy to escape, and dreams to express their true feelings. For example, Sofía has a dream about her mother that represents the solitude and lack of communication between the female protagonists of *Nubosidad variable*, saying that, "desde que murió mamá, me he ido encerrando en mí misma cada vez más, como ella" (366). Antonio Sobejano-Morán is correct in the statement that Sofía and Mariana have dreams that are provoked by repression that they have seen and "se ven perseguidas por su pasado y se sieten culpables por no haberlo enfrentado anteriormente" (193).

Another way that this novel relates to the other two is the incorporation of the *novela rosa*. As in *El cuarto de atrás*, the protagonists are able to find their independence instead of relying on relationships with men, unlike in *Entre visillos*. *El cuarto de atrás* is an incomplete *novela rosa* that does not end with a traditional happy ending, signifying a new type of female novel that evolved beyond the *novela rosa*. In *Nubosidad variable* Martín Gaite introduces the *novela rosa* in both characters. The love affairs of Mariana that include eroticism again show an evolution from the traditional *novela rosa*. (Pérez, "Contemporary" 3). But like the first two

novels studied, *Nubosidad variable* is not without elements of the *novela rosa*. The protagonists escape and eventually find independence from these elements of the *novela rosa*. For example, during Mariana's last visit with Raimundo she represents the conventional feminine role (Pérez, "Contemporary" 3):

> Te parecerá de novela rosa, como me lo está pareciendo a mí cuando te lo cuento. Y también entonces...pensé que esa doctora León tenía resonancias de protagonista de Carmen de Icaza, y que ya no estamos en edad. Pero fueron los últimos ramalazos de lucidez hasta esta tarde. Había decidido meterme en la función. (55)

In the beginning, Sofía identifies more with the traditional women in the *novela rosa*. She needs Eduardo for her self-worth, as Sobejano-Morán explains: "Sofía sigue con Eduardo el mismo patrón que otras mujeres, y se mira en él para recibir su aprobación y reconocimiento" (189). This female identity under marriage changes in *Nubosidad variable*. Her character evolves throughout the novel:

> En su relación con Eduardo, su esposo, Sofía reexamina los valores opresivos del sistema patriarcal, contrasta la imagen devaluada que le devuelve el espejo de su esposo con la que ella tiene de sí misma y decide, como la narradora de *El cuarto de atrás*, participar en la creación de su propia identidad al margen del sistema patriarcal. (Sobejano-Morán 189)

Change in Sofía begins to take place when Mariana and she begin to write again after many years. With her husband, she is an object. With her interactions with Mariana, however, "empezará un proceso de reconocimiento personal" (Sobejano-Morán 190). Mariana also changes throughout the novel once they begin to communicate again. As someone who was used

to listening to others' problems and not her own, Mariana had a fear of communication and of talking about her personal problems. She loses this fear by the end of the novel, showing what may be a representation of the new independent woman.

For Sofía to attempt to discover her identity, she must piece the parts of her life together like a collage. The actual collage that she creates represents this part of her life as she makes the artwork with parts of her diary, old letters, parts of a broken mirror, and other mementos from her past (Sobejano-Morán 190). Sofía describes the metaphor for this part of her life when she says, "se titula 'Gente en un cóctel.' Es un poco en plan collage. Ahora le voy a pegar por todas partes triangulitos de papel de plata, como si fueran trozos de espejo" (35). The collage also alludes to the event that led to the years of silence between Mariana and Sofía. Remembering this event and others as she organizes her notes, Sofía is forced to interpret the significance of her emotions (Sobejano-Morán 191). She is forced to remember her experiences with Guillermo. This is the author's way of showing the character's significance outside of the men who are a part of her life: her own self-worth and independence.

As seen in *El cuarto de atrás*, the effects of reading and the literary models on Spanish women in the Franco regime are again important in *Nubosidad variable*. Pérez describes the importance:

> Women's role as reader and as writer dominates *Nubosidad variable* and contributes much of the novel's *intrahistoria*, the background of growing up female under the traditionalist, phallocentric Franco regime. From the vantage point of the present, the two-protagonists/narrative voices reconstruct three decades of personal and collective women's history and women's readings, reading which often privileged women's writings. ("Nubosidad" 304-305)

Martín Gaite stresses the role of women as speaker, writer, and reader in *Nubosidad variable*. Like *El cuarto do atrás*, it is filled with elements of the *novela rosa*, but it critiques the *novela* by demonstrating its failures. It breaks away from the traditional *novela rosa* with the large "number and variety of literary, musical and cinematographic intertexts" (Pérez, "Nubosidad" 305). Some of these include Emily Bronte, Natalia Ginzburg, *Don Quijote*, "The Raven," *Nada,* the Beatles, *Wuthering Heights*, and allusions to movies (Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, symbols of the oppressed and the rebel) (Pérez, "Nubosidad" 305).

Like *El cuarto de atrás*, the novel also searches for a way for the women to express themselves and it succeeds once an interlocutor exists. The protagonist in *El cuarto de atrás* searches for an interlocutor and finds one in the Man in Black, Alejandro. However, in this novel, the interlocutor switches between the women. The women write to each other as if being asked questions and confess to each other. The women in *Nubosidad variable* think of the other (their reaction to the letter, the visualization of where they are composing their letter) because they are each other's interlocutor.

IV. Conclusions

Like *Entre visillos*, *El cuarto de atrás* and *Nubosidad variable,* as well as Carmen Martín Gaite's other works, deal with love, marriage, and the relationships between men and women, as well as historical references from the Franco era. The novelist's feminine protagonists often have autobiographical traits of the writer, including non-traditional ideas, rebelliousness against conformity, and an interest in academics (including writing and higher learning).

There are differences, as we have seen, in Martín Gaite's distinct periods of literay production. Pérez notes that in Martín Gaite's earliest works, her protagonists, "constrained by realities of life under Franco – tend to failure or authorial abandonment near the beginning of

their journey, with the open-ended narrative constituting more of a question than an answer" ("Carmen" 172). *Entre visillos* fits this example of the early literature as it develops the lives of women, emphasizing the struggle for space of the nonconforming women, Natalia and Elvira. As the title refers to curtains, some of the women (like Natalia and Elvira) look out of the curtains to the outside world, while others (more traditional) hide behind them. The repression of women in a patriarchal society is apparent, especially in the couples of the novel. While both the traditional and non-traditional women's feelings are silenced, it is the women who break out against the norm who express their feelings in diaries and fantasies.

Pérez compares Martín Gaite's later period (post-Franco) to the earlier one, where "her protagonists face fewer sociopolitical constraints and enjoy more options, more frequently appear as mature, and manage increasingly, to find escape routes from the gender trap to seek their own freedom and self-realization" ("Carmen" 172). These changes in the novels reflect the history of Spain during and after the war as the options for women increased. Democracy led to feminine autonomy and independence and eliminated most of the stringent constraints that Franco had put on the feminine sex. The culture began to favor those protagonists who were able to surpass the traditional ideas and limitations of women (Pérez, "Carmen" 172).

The path of the novels is built both by societal change and personal change for Martín Gaite. Earlier novels show the journey's beginning (as in *Entre visillos*). *El cuarto de atrás* represents the bridge between the earlier and later works, with a woman just learning to be independent, still "unable to visualize her journey's end" (Pérez, "Carmen" 172). The novels of the nineties (seen here in *Nubosidad variable*) portray women, not without problems, but strong-minded and independent by the end. In all three of the novels studied, Martín Gaite deals with

the personal struggles of the protagonists to break away from the confines of the feminine gender and find independence and self-discovery.

It is clear that the narrator in *El cuarto de atrás* was more like the characters of Elvira or Natalia than the traditional women due to her negative memories of the duties of women and their training to be the perfect women of society. She is visibly not living in the same society, however, as Elvira and Natalia. This is apparent in her success in having a career as a writer (improbable in Franco's era), as well as in the sexual equality that is seen in the conversation between the narrator and Alejandro. Sofía begins as a character more similar to the traditional women in *Entre visillos* than to any other characters. However, the difference is that she and Mariana evolve to be strong independent women, as does the protagonist in *El cuarto de atrás.*

The novels also change the way that the author expresses the protagonist's view of society. In *Entre visillos*, she managed to express the constraints of the era without mentioning directly negative parts of the Franco regime. In *El cuarto de atrás*, she was able to voice the negative thoughts that she had about the regime without fear of being censored. In the last novel, *Nubosidad variable*, her reflection on society now shows the elements that had changed, such as the openness with which previously censored and repressed ideas could be expressed, without mentioning the postwar era.

Another indicator that the female protagonist has evolved from those in *Entre visillos* involves the idea of the *novela rosa*. As previously noted, this novel resembles the past female romance novel. In *El cuarto de atrás* and *Nubosidad variable*, however, unlike in the romantic novel and *Entre visillos*, there is no longer an emphasis on love and marriage between men and women. Instead, the closeness in a mother-daughter relationship and platonic friendship, as well as the independence of the women, are the foci. This new, innovative, liberating way of

expressing the independent female protagonist, and the silence and spatial elements in *El cuarto de atrás*, coincides with the period of political and social liberation (especially for women) in Spain after the death of Franco.

The idea of escape from silence as well as the spatial elements that either lead to confinement or release are also important in the comparison of the three novels. In the first novel, women in society are silenced and suppressed, with the protagonists showing their frustration by only quietly expressing it (either to one other individual or in a diary or dream). In the second novel, the interlocutor leads the protagonist away from the silence of the past repressive society and into the symbolic other back room where the woman is now liberated. In the last novel, the women openly express their frustration with their lives to one another through their narratives.

This study shows that Martín Gaite was able to express, in her female protagonists, the views of women of the period, the politics and societal aspects of the time, and women's attitudes towards their status. This study also reveals that the three novels form a transition from Martín Gaite's focus on the political, social, cultural, and economic conditions that restricted women, to her later work where she chose to focus on personal problems in the lives of independent women, showing that when the latter issues have been remedied, women can advance and reach full autonomy. The differences in the novels in terms of spatial arrangement, silence, escape, discussion of the Franco regime, independence, restriction and intimacy reflect the changes in Spanish society. Through three historical moments, Carmen Martín Gaite, in these three fictional creations, clearly depicts the changing role of women at critical moments of Spanish history.

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